

Happy Holidays!

This December 2013 photo shows an evergreen tree that is decorated beside the Bonneville Shoreline Trail in the foothills above Ogden, Utah. About this time every year, for at least the last half-dozen or so, someone has been decorating a small evergreen tree in the foothills above Ogden, carefully placing ornaments on the branches, draping it in garland and, this year, topping it with a large red snowflake.

(AP Photo/Standard-Examiner, Mark Saal)



The Aruba Today Newspaper announces that due to the holidays, we will not be in circulation Wednesday, December 25th and Thursday, December 26th. We will be back on newsstands everywhere bright and early to serve our readers and advertisers first thing in the morning, Friday, December 27th. Until then, Season's Greetings and Happy Holidays from the team at the Aruba Today Newspaper!



HO, HO, HO? OH, NO, NO, NO!

HENRY ALFORD

© 2013 New York Times

We skitter, we dodge. My boyfriend and I will be flying to India on Christmas Day. Jetting off on Santa's Judgment Day is not unusual for me; I'm among that tiny percentage of the population who hears "Santa's helpers" and thinks "skycaps." Part of my seasonal wanderlust lies in the belief that a Christmas celebrated by two adults and no children can be eerily quiet, a Beckett play performed in a canyon on the moon. But the larger part lies in my conviction that the most beautiful and tinselly bauble to be found Dec. 25 is reduced airfare.

For others, dodging Christmas and its rigors is more a matter of self-preservation.

"My husband and I have not entirely regretted our unavailability for family gatherings at Christmastime on account of our duties in the church as ordained persons," an acquaintance told me. "Truth be told, when these duties changed over the years, we didn't exactly alert the extended families of our sudden availability, but rather used the transition to shield ourselves from the freneticism of the season."

The net result?

"Guilt abounded," said my acquaintance. "Multilayered guilt abounded. One year we even went and sat in a pew together, no less."

We're party poopers at one of the biggest parties of the year.

Given that the divide between party pooperism and bad manners is gossamer thin, what should Christmas deniers keep in mind when interacting with the less seasonally challenged? While some of us refuseniks seem to have an excuse ("I'm pretty awkward and shy," said Allen Yuen, the general manager of Mission Chinese restaurant,

"so I always tell my family that I have to work so that I don't have to socialize with them"), some of us exhibit behavior that falls into a gray area.

First, an understanding of the long history of Christian non-observance of the holiday can help leech our holiday-dodging of any strains of defensiveness. To wit, nothing in the New Testament specifies the date or month of Jesus' birth; even the year is open to debate. Bruce Forbes, a professor of religious studies at Morningside College in Iowa and the author of "Christmas: A Candid History," added that early Christians recog-

Baptists, Quakers, Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists either ignored or discouraged celebrating Christmas until the late 19th century, Forbes said; throughout much of that century, Congress met and businesses and schools were open Dec. 25.

But it was also during the 19th century that the widespread family-centered celebration of Christmas got its start, once the overtly religious significance of the holiday had dissipated.

"We now have a cultural Christmas and a Christian Christmas," Forbes said. Asked about those few con-

correctness," said Bill Talen, a performance artist and political activist who, dressed as an Elvis-like preacher named Reverend Billy and accompanied by a 30-person choir from an organization called the Church of Stop Shopping, stages anti-consumerist and anti-imperialist protests in big-box stores, chain stores and multinational banks.

Talen said: "I appreciate that people are creating their own holidays now, similar to how people are creating their own weddings now. Some folks don't want to hurt their parents' or grandparents' feelings, so they have two holidays: one for the commercial, Christian part of their family, and one for their friends.

"When we gather with our fellow orphans, we usually take the opportunity to make a heartfelt connection out of the world of friendship. It's a new kind of honesty. New culture makes new courtesies. Part of what's been compromised about the traditional celebration of the holidays is that the celebration has become congealed. How much Bing Crosby can you listen to? That's a false courtesy."

Fired up by Talen's vision, I vowed to try to uncongeal my Christmas. I wanted to acknowledge people whose existence I'm thankful for. Upon writing my third heartfelt email to a friend or relative with whom I had fallen out of touch, I realized that saddling people with such a missive during a busy time of the year was burden-making for them. So I switched to creating homemade cards. For each person or couple, I drew on a piece of typing paper two cartoonlike images of memorable events we shared in 2013, or two objects or scenarios that I associated with that person. My mother got a

rendering of the gift shop she runs at her retirement community; one of my sisters got a picture of her barbecuing chicken at 5 a.m. for an office party.

Drawing these pictures was hugely enjoyable. But it asked little of me, and was rooted in the same self-involvement that being a writer often is. The harder task was to walk up to the gentleman who cleans the bathrooms in the building where I rent an office. I had pettily stopped tipping him at Christmas three years ago because he never acknowledged the money, and he doesn't say hello in the hallway. So this year I handed him an envelope with \$20 in it and said, "Thank you for everything you do." He smiled and thanked me. I said, "I don't know your name." He said, "Jorge. Or George. Jorge or George."

The second difficult task saw me read a friend's 472-page debut novel, a book whose rapturous reviews had been a source of jealousy for me during the year. I wrote my friend and told him that I loved the book (which I did), and then, bullet-point style, I itemized 11 passages that had astonished me or made me laugh. I want nothing from my actions; I expect nothing from them. I'm loath even to assess how they have made me or their recipients feel, given that expectations and a fetishization of showy results lie at the heart of the Christmas problem. But I will say that it's strangely comforting, if not womblike, to hold the tinsel and family newsletters and eggnog in abeyance while savoring something more tender. As my friend's novel put it: "Everyday life continues during a love affair, though it loses any power to be menacing. One sees it as if from the other side of the room." □



Traditional Christmases aren't for everyone, but that does not mean the spirit of the holiday should be rejected.

(Matt Huynh/The New York Times)

nized the date of a person's death, not birth.

"We talk about C and E Christians, who only go to church on Christmas and Easter," he said. "For the early Christians, it was all E."

In mid-1600s England, the Puritans started suppressing Christmas because they thought it was rooted in pagan superstition and had led to the kind of licentiousness that a modern-day observer might call Mobcaps Gone Wild; this bah-humbuggery spread to the colonies of New England. Major American denominations such as

temporary Christians who object to the holiday on religious grounds, Forbes, who is an ordained United Methodist minister, said, "I wish people would chill out."

The second thing for us non-observers to keep in mind is that we should never let our own churlish abstention dampen the proceedings for others. An innate distrust of fruitcake is not grounds for spitting onto a dessert plate a spray of currants and candied grapefruit peel like a human chipper.

"Don't attack other people's Christmas with your political

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Rain, ice taper; cold temps stay for parts of US

ALANNA DURKIN
Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Maine (AP) — Parts of the country socked by a wild weekend storm will be covered with ice and without power through Christmas and beyond thanks to a steady diet of freezing rain and cold temperatures.

The first full day of winter, Sunday, brought a mix including snow in the Midwest and balmy temperatures along the Mid-Atlantic. Rain and melting snow led to swelling creeks and streams, closed roads and flooded underpasses in Indiana, Ohio and other Great Lakes states.

More than 390,000 homes and businesses were without power Monday in Michigan, upstate New York and northern New England, down from Sunday's peak of more than half a million. Most were in Michigan, whose largest utilities said it'll be days before power is restored because of the difficulty of working around broken lines.

In Maine, the number of customers without power spiked to more than 78,000, and the cold persisted.

"It's certainly not going away," Margaret Curtis, a

meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Gray, Maine, said Monday. "In fact, we don't have very many areas where we're expecting temperatures to rise above freezing."

That means untreated roads and sidewalks from the upper Midwest to northern New England will remain a slippery, dangerous mess as people head out for last-minute shopping or holiday travel.

In Maine, Judith Martin was heading from her home in South Grafton, Mass., to Kingston when she stopped at a rest area along Interstate 95 in West Gardiner. She said roads got worse the farther north she drove. "The trees are loaded with ice, so it makes me think the road is loaded with ice," Martin said.

At least 11 deaths in the U.S. were blamed on the storm, including five people killed in flooding in Kentucky and a woman who died after a tornado with winds of 130 mph struck in Arkansas. Another woman died in Arkansas when she lost control of her vehicle on an icy patch of an interstate. A Vermont man died from carbon monoxide poison-



Heather Griffin, of Buffalo, N.Y., and her dog Sal walk beneath ice-covered trees in Buffalo, New York. Parts of the country socked by a wild weekend storm will be covered with ice and without power through Christmas and beyond thanks to a steady diet of freezing rain and cold temperatures.

(AP Photo/Mike Groll)

ing caused by a generator that was running after the storm knocked out power at his house, state police said. More than 4,000 flights were behind schedule, the majority of those in New York, Washington, Chicago, Denver, Dallas and Houston.

And more than 275 flights were canceled, mostly in Chicago, Denver, Houston and Dallas, aviation data company FlightAware said.

The number is in line with a typical travel day and much improved from Sunday's 700 cancellations. There are usually more than 30,000 daily flights in the United States.

Delta Air Lines said a taxiway that may have frozen over was suspected in an accident at Detroit Metropolitan Airport: An Atlanta-bound jetliner slid onto the grass, but no one was hurt. While the cold will continue

to harass people, there's no major precipitation on the horizon through the end of the week, Curtis said.

"It will give people some time to recover from this," she said.

Meanwhile, flooding in Indiana and Ohio, parts of which got 3 to 5 inches of rain over the weekend, caused no reported injuries but forced small-scale evacuations and closed several roads. □

'A Christmas Story': Longing (And Lobbying) For A BB Gun

NEIL GENZLINGER

© 2013 New York Times

NEW YORK - Making a musical out of "A Christmas Story" must have hardly seemed like work to Joseph Robinette, the book writer, and Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, who provided the music and lyrics. How easy was it? When the second-act curtain went up on opening night of the production now running at the Theater at Madison

ity and good will, all the stage version has to do is hit signature moments like the flagpole scene with reasonable competence, and "A Christmas Story: The Musical" certainly does that. The show was first seen in New York last holiday season on Broadway, and the current production features several of the same actors in pivotal roles, chief among them Dan Lauria ("The Wonder Years") as

gift, a BB gun, drives the story.

The cast is full of children, and the director, John Rando, doesn't always draw professional-caliber performances out of them, sometimes giving the show the feel of a seasonal school pageant. But, especially with the move to Madison Square Garden, the audience isn't there for refined theater so much as for a holiday spectacle. The pro-



In an undated handout photo, From left: Noah Baird, Erin Dilly, John Bolton and Jake Lucas in "A Christmas Story: The Musical." The show, a musical stage version of the Jean Shepherd holiday film classic, looks as if it will settle in as a seasonal perennial by virtue of its broad appeal. (Carol Rosegg/The New York Times)

Square Garden, a flagpole received a smattering of applause. The beloved story by Jean Shepherd that is the basis for the show is so well known that the mere sight of the pole onstage told the audience what was coming: Shepherd's wry, ridiculous schoolyard scene, in which one boy dares another to stick his tongue onto the pole's frigid metal. With an audience preloaded with that kind of famil-

Shepherd, narrating the tale. Many of the laughs come courtesy of John Bolton, who returns with a frenetic performance as the Old Man, the father of the central figure in the story, young Ralphie. Erin Dilly is back, too, as Ralphie's mother, as is Caroline O'Connor as Miss Shields, his teacher. Jake Lucas, a youngster with a strong singing voice, is Ralphie, whose yearning for a particular Christmas

duction has just enough flourishes in it to oblige. There is a showstopping musical number in each act, one featuring a kick line of leg-shaped lamps, the other showcasing an impressive tap solo by a youngster named Luke Spring. There are also two live, crowd-pleasing dogs. "A Christmas Story" looks as if it will settle in as a holiday perennial by virtue of its broad appeal if nothing else. □

TV'S MERRY MARATHONS

Sharon Kennedy Wynne

© 2012 Tampa Bay Times

If ever a day was made for lying around in your jammies binge-watching your favorite shows, it's Christmas. The pressure is over, the stores are closed and it's time to catch up with or revisit some TV gems.

A CHRISTMAS STORY (Tuesday-Wednesday), TBS Did you realize that Bob Clark, the director of this totally charming and lovable Christmas film, is also the director of the raunchy Porky's? The cult classic comedy set in the 1940s about the family life of young Ralphie as Christmas approaches has a loose plot that makes it easy during TBS' annual marathon to check in at any point, watch a scene or two that you like, then go back to getting the pies out of the oven. This year marks the marathon's 17th run and it remains one of the most popular bits of holiday programming events on cable, drawing more than 50 million viewers at some point in the marathon.

BREAKING BAD (Friday-Sunday), AMC What? You didn't get the \$300 collector's edition package for Christmas? Invest some time instead as AMC airs all five seasons of the masterful Emmy-winning drama, the last time you can see the whole series for free. Tread lightly, Bad fans. Starting at noon each day, the episodes will run Dec. 27-30.

THE WALKING DEAD (Dec. 31-Jan. 2), AMC And you thought you had nothing to do New Year's Eve. Spend it with zombies. The two-day Walking Dead marathon starts at 9 a.m. Dec. 31. Episodes will air back-to-back until 5 a.m. on Jan. 2. New episodes of The Walking Dead return on Feb. 9.

HAPPY ENDINGS (Dec. 31-Jan. 1), VH1 The lovable comedy (canceled by ABC this year) will be back on the air, first with a marathon of all 57 episodes starting on New Year's Eve at 8 p.m. and running all the way through New Year's Day. Reruns of the show will then settle into their new time slot on Wednesdays from 7 to 9 p.m. starting Jan. 8 on VH1.

ELF (Tuesday-Wednesday), Starz You cotton-headed ninny muggins can't get enough of Buddy the elf, so the Starz channel will show 24 hours of Elf starting at noon Tuesday.

BAD SANTA (noon to 6 a.m. Tuesday-Wednesday), Starz Comedy For those who landed on the naughty list this year, Starz Comedy is showing 24 hours of Bad Santa, the oh-so-wrong comedy starring Billy Bob Thornton. It starts at noon Tuesday.

DOCTOR WHO (Tuesday-Wednesday) BBC America The Doctor Who Christmas special will premiere in the U.S. with the final regular appearance of Matt Smith as the Eleventh Doctor and the first regular appearance of Peter Capaldi as the Twelfth Doctor following his brief cameo in "The Day of the Doctor." It premieres at 9 p.m. on Christmas Day, but not before an all-day marathon of Season 6 episodes beginning at 4 a.m. Christmas Eve, followed by Doctor Who Christmas specials, including a Doctor version of A Christmas Carol and "The Doctor, The Widow and The Wardrobe," a Narnia-themed special that is a fan favorite. Then it's Season 7 episodes, "Day of the Doctor" at 6 p.m. on Christmas Day followed by a fond farewell to Matt Smith in an hour-long retrospective documentary featuring highlights with the man himself, his castmates, writers, producers and celebrity Whovians. □

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For doormen, the holidays bring tips and colleagues' curiosity

VIVIAN YEE

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NEW YORK - When Christmastime comes to Wall Street, bankers are summoned to bosses' offices to learn the number that junior analysts and executives alike regard as a reflection of self-worth: their year-end bonuses, linked to performance, earnings and perhaps how much their boss likes them.

Around the same time, many of those captains of finance are heading home to bestow their own form of the annual performance review: the holiday-season tips folded in cards, slipped in envelopes and handed to building doormen, porters and superintendents. That type of bonus might be in the hundreds of dollars, not the hundreds of thousands. But just as the bankers fume and fuss over how their annual rewards measure up to their peers', the doormen who hail their cabs and fetch their packages are also prone to fretting about the thickness of one another's envelopes. Standing at attention in the foyer of a large building off East End Avenue, Thomas, a doorman who once worked as an information technology technician for

Deutsche Bank, explained that a few sidelong glances at other doormen's holiday cards are only to be expected. "If you think of it, you just have to look at the human psyche; we all have jeal-

ousness of each other," he said in grave, diplomatic tones befitting his bowtied uniform. "It's no different with doormen than it is with hedge fund managers." But like several other doormen interviewed around the Upper East Side, most of whom declined to give

their full names for fear of upsetting the residents they serve or the management companies they work for, Thomas said he kept his annual take to himself to avoid tension in the lobby. If another doorman reveals

petitiveness in other buildings," said Steve Santos, 46, a doorman who has worked for 20 years. "But we're a family. We look out for each other." "Sometimes the best thing is just to not say anything,"

enue, complained of a fellow doorman who never made small talk or played with the residents' children, yet who scowled when his envelopes were thinner come bonus time. "You'll have your one guy who won't mind his own business and ask, 'What'd you get, what'd you get, what'd you get,'" Anton said as he hung silvery spheres on the lobby Christmas tree. Anton said he would tell someone like that what he had been given, and then watch the colleague get nettled.

Doormen may have yet to channel their curiosity into an iPhone app, as Wall Street insiders did with Banker's Bonus 2013, an app that allows bankers to anonymously compare their bonuses with those of other extravagantly compensated financial workers around the world. But doormen have their own ways of knowing who received a relatively paltry \$20 or \$40 from a resident and who earned \$400 or even more.

Most tenants tend to give similar amounts to staff members of similar stature; doormen usually make more than porters, for instance. □



A doorman works on Park Avenue in the Manhattan borough of New York in December, 2013. While many doormen keep quiet about how much money residents give them, others can't resist comparing notes.

(Joshua Bright/The New York Times)

the tip he received from a tenant, he said, he simply says: "Good for you." Several doormen interviewed said that furtive comparisons were common - though not, they hastened to add, at their own buildings. "You do hear about com-

Santos added, chuckling. "I just go with it, take the money and run." A utopia his lobby may be, but there are a few workers on every block who cannot resist comparing notes. Anton, a doorman at a building near the more expensive parts of Park Av-

A Rockwell Holiday, At Last

AIMEE LEE BALL

© 2013 New York Times

Introductions at past holiday gatherings have been comically convoluted for Judy Bowman.

"I used to explain, 'This is Amy's sister Vicky's husband, Joel,'" said Bowman, a casting director in New York. "Now I can just say 'my brother-in-law.'"

That's because last month, Bowman, 42, married her longtime girlfriend, Amy Levin, 55, an executive assistant, and the women will experience the holidays as spouses (spice?) for the first time. Many same-sex couples believe that their newly official status will make seasonal celebrations more meaningful, and introductions around the eggnog bowl more conventional, putting to rest various permutations of "partner" or the dreaded "friend."

"The language about what to call each other is bizarre," Bowman said. "We'd just gotten comfortable with 'partner,' even

though we're not at a square dance or a law firm. But 'wife' isn't sexy - it implies a flannel nightgown, not a lacy negligee. I've been saying, 'This is my girlfriend, whom I just married.'"

"Marriage changes things in subtle ways," she said. "We've gone separately to our families for holidays, but other couples wouldn't be expected to split up that way. Now that we're married, we're going to act like every other married couple: We'll alternate families every other year, like my grandmother does, which is weird."

Since the right to use the same terminology as heterosexual couples was hard-won, some newlyweds are embracing it.

"I love the word 'wife,'" said Lauryn Hegarty, 26, who works in Internet-technology sales in Orange County, Calif. "Girlfriend sounds sexier, but we're not 18 anymore."

Even before her marriage



Judy Bowman, left, and Amy Levin, who are celebrating their first Christmas as a married couple, at their home in New York in December, 2013. Many same-sex couples, like Bowman and Levin, believe their newly official status will make seasonal celebrations more meaningful, and introductions more conventional, putting to rest various permutations of "partner" or the dreaded "friend."

(Nicole Bengiveno/The New York Times)

to Desiree Ekno, 27, a special-education teacher, Hegarty felt embraced by her extended clan.

"But marriage makes me feel validated," she said. "We have a nice holiday routine: her family for Christmas Eve, my parents for Christmas Day. We don't

have any uncles that make us feel uncomfortable."

And if anyone does make an inappropriate comment - like "the occasional weird cousin's little dig" - they give it right back.

"Family is family," she added, "whether you're straight or gay, especially with the addition of alcohol."

After John Livesay married Oscar Ross in August, the latter took the surname Livesay.

"And when our first holiday card arrived, it was addressed to 'The Livesays,' which was very touching," said John Livesay, 54, the executive director at Condé Nast Corporate Partnerships in Los Angeles. "We've been together for five years, and the way we feel about each other is the same, but my husband is a charge nurse at UCLA Hospital, and he knows that marriage license is much more than a piece of paper. He's seen peo-

ple have to pretend that a lover was a sister because they had no rights about any treatment the partner was receiving."

Oscar Livesay, 42, is Mexican, and in the past the couple went to Mexico for the holidays.

"But this year we thought: 'Why don't we change it up now that we're married?'" John Livesay said. "We feel like more of a family in a whole different way - we even have a puppy - so let's stay in town and create a new memory."

Jonathan Zipper and Phillip Maljevic, both 29, scheduled their wedding and South American honeymoon in November to be back in time for Thanksgiving and Hanukkah with family.

"We'd opted to go very traditional for our wedding," said Zipper, an actor and comedian, "because we felt we were getting married, we weren't getting gay-married.□"



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US Financial Front:

Online shopping popular, but won't save season

MAE ANDERSON
AP Retail Writer

ATLANTA (AP) — More Americans are deciding to shop online this holiday season instead of heading

smartphones and tablets. These lingering issues come from years of brick-and-mortar retailers mostly ignoring the possibilities of online shopping while on-

number of factors: In the early days of online shopping, frustrated shoppers often found the items they wanted to buy online were out of stock. In recent years, though, retailers have worked to boost their online inventory: For example, Wal-Mart Stores Inc., the world's largest retailer, has doubled the number of items it carries online this year to 6 million. Overall, retailers are better prepared than they were a few years ago to fill online orders via their inventory in store or in manufacturers' distribution centers, said Forrester analyst Sucharita Mulpuru. But they still have inventory problems that cause them to run out of popular merchandise, analysts say. And when that happens, retailers can lose potential sales.

But inventory isn't the only problem that continues to plague online shopping. Retailers have come a long way toward fixing some of the problems that caused their sites to crash and freeze up in the early days of online shopping. Crashes and slowdowns occur far less today than they did a few years ago, said Aaron Rudger, senior manager web performance of Keynote, which monitors retailers' online performance. Keynote estimates that 23 percent of retailers had web site problems during the official kickoff of the holiday shopping season, the four-day Thanksgiving weekend, compared with 71 percent 5 years ago. But crashes still happen far more often than they should, says Rudger, who found that the Motorola

web site crashed on the Monday after the four-day Thanksgiving weekend known as 'Cyber Monday' when it launched its Moto X phone. Urban Outfitters also crashed, he says. "Those are pretty well known brands so that to us is a bit of a surprise," Rudger said. Those types of experiences can turn off shoppers from buying online. For instance, Patrice Grell Yursik, 34, wanted to buy a warm coat for her husband when she started shopping online on Cyber Monday, but changed her mind after she ran into troubles on Macy's web site. "Macy's had really great deals and I had an awesome Michael Kors coat in mind but when I went to try to get it in black it was sold out," said the style blogger who lives in Chicago. □



A sign for a shopping application is placed at the toys section in Kmart, in New York. Mobile shopping accounts for about 10 percent of online sales this season, but it made up half of all online traffic during Black Friday weekend, according to IBM Benchmark, which did not give dollar amounts.

to crowded stores. But that alone won't save what is turning out to be a ho-hum Christmas for department stores and clothing chains. Online sales have surged 9 percent so far this holiday season as Wal-Mart, Macy's and other retailers improved their web sites and prices to better compete with their online nemesis Amazon.com. Meanwhile, shopping at physical stores is up just 2 percent. Still, it is estimated that for every \$9 shoppers spend in physical stores during the two-month season that ends on New Year's Eve, they'll only spend \$1 online, according to research firm comScore. Why? Retailers haven't solved many of the challenges that initially turned many shoppers off from buying online. Some web sites still crash fairly frequently. Hot merchandise often sells out quickly online. And retailers haven't convinced people to use their shopping apps on

line giants like Amazon got shoppers used to the convenience of it. Solving these problems will help determine how retailers fare during the holiday season and beyond as shoppers increasingly buy online. "The people that are going to win ... are the ones that are there for the customer however they want to shop," said Joel Anderson, president and CEO of Walmart.com, Wal-Mart's online business. The growing interest in online shopping is evident this season. Sales at physical stores were up 2 percent to \$176.7 billion from Nov. 1 through last Sunday compared with the same period last year, according to ShopperTrak, a Chicago store data tracker. Meanwhile, online spending from home and work desktop computers was up 9 percent to \$37.8 billion, according to research firm comScore. Still, analysts say online shopping isn't reaching its full potential because of a



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Activists:

Syrian aircraft bomb the north, 45 dead

DIAA HADID
Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Government forces widened a bombing campaign in rebel-held areas of northern Syria on Monday, striking the northern city of Aleppo and a town on the Turkish border in raids that left an estimated 45 people dead, activists said.

The attack on the border town of Azaz was the latest attack using powerful but inaccurate "barrel bombs" on the Aleppo region, said an activist who goes by the name of Abu al-Hassan Marea. He said residents in the town told him that 15 people were killed in the strike. Another activist group, the Local Coordination Committees, gave the same death toll.

The Azaz attack suggests the government is expanding its range of targets a week after it began an unusually heavy air offensive against Aleppo on Dec. 15, dropping barrel bombs on rebel-held areas from helicopters. Aleppo, Syria's largest city, is divided into government-and-rebel-ruled areas.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that multiple air raids on the Aleppo neighborhoods of Sukkari, Maadi, Marjeh

and Nairab left at least 30 people including 12 children dead on Monday. It said the death toll could rise as there are many people who were seriously

air raids on the northern province of Aleppo have killed at least 301 people including 87 children, 30 women and nearly 30 opposition fighters since mid-

The main Western-backed Syrian opposition group, the Syrian National Coalition, warned that if the bombing campaign against Aleppo continues



A Syrian man mourns as he carries the body of a child who was killed following a Syrian government airstrike at the neighborhood of Marjeh in the northern city of Aleppo, Syria, Monday, Dec. 23, 2013. Syrian government forces widened a bombing campaign in rebel-held areas of northern Syria on Monday, striking one of the main border towns near Turkey and killing several people, said activists.

(AP Photo/AMC)

wounded. On Sunday, 65 were killed near an Aleppo marketplace in one of the bloodiest days of the air campaign, according to activists.

Rami Abdurrahman, who heads the Observatory, said earlier in the day that

December. That figure did not include those reported killed Monday.

The aid group Doctors Without borders has said the bombs killed at least 189 people and wounded 879 in the first four days alone.

it will not take part in U.N.-sponsored peace talks planned for Jan. 22 in Switzerland. A coalition statement quoted the group's Secretary General Badr Jamous as saying they will boycott the talks in case the air raids do not stop. □

Rivalries within North Korea elite cause of purge

© 2013 New York Times

SEOUL, South Korea - South Korea's intelligence chief said Monday that Jang Song Thaek, the uncle of the North Korean leader Kim Jong Un who was executed this month, apparently had not plotted a coup as Pyongyang had said, but had fallen victim to intrigue within the country's elite over lucrative business deals, according to lawmakers in Seoul.

Jang, 67, who was once believed to be the second most powerful man in North Korea, was executed on Dec. 12 on charges of plotting to overthrow his nephew's government, four days after he was hauled out of a meeting of the ruling Workers' Party at which he was stripped of all titles. The highly unusual public purge and execution of a member of the North's ruling family has set off widespread speculation about the possibility of a power struggle within the secretive regime. During a closed-door meeting Monday of the South Korean National Assembly's intelligence committee, Nam Jae-joon, director of the National Intelligence Service, disputed Pyongyang's assertion that Jang had tried to usurp his nephew's power. Rather, he said, Jang and his associates had provoked the enmity of rivals within the North's elite by dominating lucrative business deals, such as the sale of North Korean coal to China.

"There had been friction building up among the agencies of power in North Korea over privileges and over the abuse of power by Jang Song Thaek and his associates," Nam was quoted as saying. □

Malta revives plan to sell citizenship

VALLETTA, Malta (AP) — The Maltese government on Monday announced a revised scheme to sell citizenship in the European Union nation, raising the threshold of investment without introducing a residency require-

ment. Prime Minister Joseph Muscat told reporters the new requirements include a total investment of 1.15 million euros (\$1.57 million), up from the original 650,000 euros to buy a passport. Now, fast-track Maltese citizens

must also make a 350,000-euro property investment and spend another 150,000 euros in bonds or shares for at least five years.

The scheme will be capped at 1,800 passports, Muscat said, and the names of those granted citizenship

will be made public — a concession made earlier as a result of public outcry that Malta would be exposed to citizenship-seekers with ill intentions, such as terrorists. Passports will be granted at the completion of a diligence exercise, □

UAE sentences American to 1 year of jail in video case

ADAM SCHRECK
Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A court in the United Arab Emirates sentenced eight people including an American to up to a year in prison Monday after being convicted in connection to a satirical video about youth culture in Dubai.

The video they produced and uploaded to the Internet was a spoof documentary of would-be "gangsta" youth in the Gulf Arab city-state. The state-owned daily The National said they were accused of "defaming the image of United Arab Emirates society abroad." Supporters of the defendants reported that they were charged under a 2012 cybercrimes law that tightened penalties

for challenging authorities. Shezanne Cassim, a 29-year-old U.S. citizen from Woodbury, Minn., became the public face of the defendants after his family launched an effort to publicize his months-long incarceration following his arrest in April.

Cassim, who was born in Sri Lanka and moved to Dubai for work after graduating from the University of Minnesota in 2006, was sentenced Monday to a year in prison followed by deportation and received a 10,000 dirham (\$2,725) fine, according to family spokeswoman Jennifer Gore.

Cassim's brother, Shervon, called the ruling "painful and unfair."

"Shez is coming up on nine months incarceration for

making a parody. This isn't justice," he said in a statement.

American consular officials have been following the

case closely and attended Monday's hearing at the State Security Court in the federal capital, Abu Dhabi. The U.S. Embassy had no

immediate comment following the verdict. State Department deputy spokeswoman Marie Harf last week said American officials were troubled by Cassim's "prolonged incarceration" and called for "a fair and expedient trial and judgment."

Two Indian defendants received similar sentences, while two Emirati brothers were sentenced to eight months behind bars and received 5,000 dirham fines, according to The National. A third brother was pardoned.

Three other defendants, a Canadian, Briton and an American, were convicted and sentenced in absentia to the penalties given to their other foreigners. They have never been detained by authorities and so are unlikely to serve their sentences.

The paper identified the defendants only by their initials, which is common in the Emirati media. □



In this undated file photo provided by Shervon Cassim shows Shezanne Cassim of Woodbury, Minn. The American man detained for months in the United Arab Emirates and seven co-defendants were fined and sentenced to jail Monday, Dec. 23, 2013 after being convicted in connection to a satirical video about youth culture in Dubai. Officials charged that the film, a mockumentary uploaded to the Internet, spoofing would-be Dubai "gangstas" ran afoul of a 2012 cybercrimes law that tightened penalties for challenging authorities, according to supporters of one of the filmmakers, Shezanne Cassim.

(AP Photo/Shervon Cassim)

Despite protesters' blockade, Thai parties register for vote

THOMAS FULLER
© 2013 New York Times

BANGKOK - Representatives of Thailand's governing party slipped past a cordon of protesters Monday to register for the coming election, infuriating the party's detractors, who have vowed to suspend democracy until "reforms" are carried out.

In a signal that Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra will most likely return as prime minister if the party wins another majority in the Feb. 2 elections, the governing party put her at the top of its electoral list. Yingluck has faced a month of debilitating street protests in Bangkok, and she and her brother, the billionaire Thaksin Shinawatra, are the main targets of the protesters' ire.

Her selection as the party's leading candidate is likely to inflame anti-government sentiment.

The scene around the party registration site in Bangkok on Monday seemed a microcosm of the country's political standoff. Yingluck's party and other, smaller parties are eager to contest the election and put a monthlong political crisis behind them. But pro-

testers and their allies in the Democrat Party, the main opposition party, say the country must undergo reforms, largely unspecified, before any elections are held.

Although tampering with the electoral process is a criminal offense in Thailand, the protesters have largely acted with impunity. The government has said it will not use force against protesters for fear of aggravating an already tense situation.

By early Monday, the registration site, a sports facility in Bangkok, was ringed by protesters who said they would block party representatives and would-be candidates for Parliament. By late afternoon, the country's Election Commission announced that 35 political parties had filed to take part in the elections; nine parties successfully submitted applications at the registration site, and 26 other parties gave notice of their intent at a nearby police station.

Although the protesters are a diverse group, the protest leader, Suthep Thaugsuban, is from southern Thailand, as are many of his most devoted followers. □

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Putin frees his enemies as part of Sochi spin

V. ISACHENKOV
Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — It came as a shock both for those released and the general

public — President Vladimir Putin's move to pardon his foes has allowed him to drive the news agenda less than two months before

the Sochi Games. Putin is dribbling out a headline day after day in the media. First, Mikhail Khodorkovsky was re-

leased after a decade in prison, then Pussy Riot activists were pardoned and now 30 Greenpeace activists are awaiting their turn. The abrupt move by Putin to release his adversaries mixed the elements of an astute spin effort with a crude KGB-style operation. The pardons could help repair some of the damage to Russia's image before the Winter Olympics, which run Feb. 7-23, but it doesn't ease tensions with the West over Ukraine and other issues, including gay rights, and keeps tight Kremlin control over Russia's political scene unchanged. No one in Russia expected Putin to release Khodorkovsky, his arch-foe and once Russia's richest man, after more than a decade in prison. In fact, most observers felt pretty certain that authorities would file another set of criminal charges against the former oil tycoon to prevent him from walking free after serving his term.

One-time Kremlin insider, political consultant Gleb Pavlovsky, saw the gloomy expectations as part of a carefully choreographed performance ending with Khodorkovsky's surprise release and his swift move to Germany.

"It's quite obvious that it was timed for Christmas," Pavlovsky said. "Putin has turned it into a big European and global show."

Putin announced his decision to pardon Khodorkovsky as he was walking out of a four-hour news conference in response to a question from a Kremlin-friendly news outlet. If he did that at the news conference, it would have di-

verted attention from other subjects and spoiled the show.

Khodorkovsky told the media in Berlin that Putin's statement came as a surprise to him, even though he had submitted a request for a pardon on German advice. A few hours later, he was taken from his bunk in the middle of the night, flown away from prison in a helicopter and put on a Germany-bound private jet.

Some compared Khodorkovsky's release to the expulsion of dissidents during Cold War times, when Putin served as a KGB officer.

One motive behind the secretive effort could be a desire to prevent Khodorkovsky from making a triumphant exit from prison to dozens of TV cameras — something the KGB also tried to do when they quickly and quietly escorted foes of the Soviet regime out of the country.

Khodorkovsky's release topped the news for several days. Then, on Monday came the turn of the two members of the Pussy Riot punk band, who were serving two-year terms for an irreverent protest against Putin at Moscow's main cathedral in March 2012.

The two women didn't receive the same secretive treatment that Khodorkovsky had and were quickly released. Maria Alekhina was driven to a railway station, but walked away and went to a local non-governmental organization. Nadezhda Tolokonnikova went to her grandmother's home after being released from prison and briefly speaking to journalists. □



Maria Alekhina, second from left, a member of the Russian punk band Pussy Riot peaks to the media at the Committee against Torture after being released from prison, in Nizhny Novgorod, on Monday, Dec. 23, 2013.

(AP Photo/The Committee against Torture)

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Chinese vineyard owner dies in Bordeaux crash

PARIS (AP) — While on a helicopter tour of Bordeaux vineyards he had just purchased, a Chinese businessman, his 12-year-old son and two other people plunged into a wintry river and died, authorities said Monday. Hong Kong-based Lam Kok, who built a fortune in fine tea and luxury hotels before taking an interest in French winemaking, drew attention in the French media when he offered to buy the Chateau de la Riviere. It was one of a string of Chinese purchases of French vineyards and wines in recent years,

which has demonstrated China's global economic strength, and raised concerns in economically-stagnant France and elsewhere that cultural heritage — such as grapevines linked closely to the French identity — are being sold off to richer foreigners. Hours after a news conference Friday announcing the vineyard purchase, the former owner of the chateau took Lam Kok, his son and an interpreter up in a helicopter to tour the estate, said Vincent Corbel of the regional gendarme service. The helicopter soon dived

into the Dordogne River, for reasons that remain unclear. Emergency workers recovered the boy's body and most of the helicopter, but are still searching for the other victims, Corbel said Monday. The former owner of the Chateau de la Riviere vineyards, James Gregoire, owned the helicopter and appeared to have been piloting it, Corbel said. He added that the helicopter, a Robinson R44, had undergone maintenance checks two days before the crash. Lam Kok headed Hong Kong-based high-end tea and hotel company

Brilliant Group. The chateau's director, Xavier Buffo, told reporters Friday the new owner wanted to "create an esteemed place for cultural exchange around tea and wine." China has become Bordeaux's largest export market, picking up the slack as sales to other countries slip. Buffo and the mayor of nearby town Libourne seemed to be seeking to convince doubters that outside purchases of French vineyards are good for Bordeaux business, and no threat to its prestige. □

South Sudan:

US moves troops in prep for more action

LOLITA C. BALDOR PAULINE JELINEK Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. is moving additional Marines and aircraft from Spain to the Horn of Africa to provide embassy security and help with evacuations from violence-wracked South Sudan. Army Col. Steve Warren, a Pentagon spokesman, said Monday that the commander in Africa is getting the forces ready for any request that may come from the State Department. The U.N. says about 1,000 people have been killed in a week of violence in the world's newest country. A defense official said the extra forces moving to Djibouti will bring the total U.S. troops in the region to 150, with 10 aircraft, including Osprey helicopters and C-130 transport planes. Of those forces, about 45 U.S. Army troops are in South Sudan providing security. The remainder are in Djibouti, where the U.S. maintains its only perma-

nent military base in Africa. The official was not authorized to speak publicly so

vided security at the U.S. Embassy in Juba. Another couple hundred Ameri-

stable and being sent to the military hospital in Germany, Warren said, while



UNMISS relocates non-critical staff from Juba, South Sudan, to Entebbe, Uganda. Civilian helicopters evacuated U.S. citizens from the violent South Sudan city of Bor, capital of Jonglei state, seeing bouts of heavy machine gun fire, but 3,000 citizens from countries like Canada, Britain and Kenya remain trapped there, a top U.N. official said Monday.

(AP Photo/UNMISS, Irene Scott)

spoke on condition of anonymity. Troops deployed last week helped evacuate Americans and other foreign nationals and pro-

cans remain in the country, the official said. Three of the four U.S. troops injured Saturday when gunfire hit evacuation aircraft are

the fourth continues to get treatment in Nairobi, in neighboring Kenya. All were wounded in the lower body by small arms fire. □

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JEMMA WYNNE

American warns World Cup fans about Brazil police

JENNY BARCHFIELD

Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Six years ago, Elizabeth Martin's nephew Joseph was shot and killed by an off-duty police officer while out celebrating his 30th birthday in Rio de Janeiro.

Officers warily if at all, put off by the violent behavior of some police.

Martin, whose nephew was gunned down following an altercation with police over a stolen purse, worries that foreigners oblivious to Brazilian officers' reputa-

ahead of the wave of foreign visitors expected for the World Cup and the 2016 Olympics.

"I think of police brutality as Brazil's dirty little secret," Martin said in a phone interview from her home in Massachusetts, where she

and international organizations alike have long condemned Brazil's police for routinely carrying out summary executions — often officially explained away as suspects "killed while resisting arrest." A 2009 report by the U.S.-based group Human Rights Watch estimated police killed about 11,000 people in Brazil's two largest cities, Rio and Sao Paulo, from 2003 to 2009, far more than the number of non-fatal civilian injuries and police fatalities in those same areas of operation. A damning 2008 United Nations report blamed police for a "significant portion" of the country's approximately 48,000 annual slayings the year before.

During protests over the past months, the U.S. Embassy issued travel advisories warning visitors to avoid demonstrations because of possible violence between police and demonstrators. The British government also warned of violence at demonstrations.

Law enforcement authorities insist they've made great strides in reining in rogue officers, and indeed, Rio and other metropolises have seen a significant decline both in overall murder rates and "acts of resistance," or people killed by police while allegedly resisting arrest. In Rio state alone, acts of resistance fell from their peak of 1,330 in 2007 to 415 last year, according to the state's Institute of Public Security statistics agency, though some

critics contend police are "disappearing" victims by hiding their bodies. That happened in a recent high-profile case involving a slum dweller whose apparent torture and killing by police sparked protests. Roberto Alzir Dias Chaves, a state sub-secretary for mega-events, says there's been a sea change in police tactics, which he credits for reducing the number of police shooting cases.

"Our numbers are still high, without a doubt," acknowledged Alzir.

"We could like to see much lower numbers, but we have to understand that this is part of a process. . . These are the first steps, we're still at the beginning of this process, but we've made great strides."

While officers used to be rewarded for using lethal force, earning cash bonuses for killing suspects as recently as around a decade ago, a quotas system put in place in 2009 now gives bonuses to the units with the lowest lethality rates. Earlier this month, Rio state shelled out nearly \$26 million in bonuses to units that registered the biggest fall in police killings as well as a range of crime statistics in the first half of the year.

Joseph Martin was plunged headlong into Brazil's police brutality drama in May 2007, when an off-duty officer, Joao Vicente Oliveira, detained a boy who'd snatched a purse belonging to one of Martin's friends, who were out celebrating his birthday at a popular Rio nightspot.

The American, who had been living in Brazil for about two years and supported himself by teaching English, intervened, but the boy ran away.

Witnesses said Martin was arguing with Oliveira when the officer fired three shots at the American.

The officer would later allege he fired in self-defense after Martin tried to grab his weapon, but the prosecutor in the case, Viviane Tavares Henriques, said Martin "never went after the police officer's gun or in any way threatened him." □



Elizabeth Martin, of Massachusetts, speaks during an interview about her late nephew Joseph Martin in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In May of 2007, Martin's American nephew was shot and killed by an off-duty police officer following an altercation with police over a stolen purse while out celebrating his 30th birthday in Rio de Janeiro. Now, Martin has a message for foreigners set to descend on Brazil for next year's World Cup: The next Joseph Martin could be you.

(AP Photo/Felipe Dana)

Now, Martin has a message for the hordes of foreigners set to descend on Brazil for next year's World Cup: The next Joseph Martin could be you.

Within Brazil, police have long been notorious for their links to organized crime, use of heavy-handed tactics including torture and even summary executions. Citizens often approach of-

ficers could unwittingly stumble into the kind of scuffle that cost Joseph his life. Although police violence in Brazil overwhelmingly targets the country's poor and rarely affects foreigners, Martin has launched a campaign, "Don't Kill for Me: Safe Games for All," aimed at raising international public awareness of the issue — especially

stays in close contact with Brazil-based human rights campaigners and organizations representing the families of those killed by police. "People outside of Brazil have drunk the Kool-Aid of Brazil being this economic success story with beautiful beaches and bikinis and this side of it just isn't discussed, it isn't known."

Human rights campaigners

Bolivian city hires 'cholita' traffic policewomen

EL ALTO, Bolivia (AP) — This city in Bolivia's highlands has hired Aymara women dressed in traditional multi-layered Andean skirts and brightly embroidered vests to work as traffic cops and bring order to its road chaos.

About 20 of the "traffic cholitas" have been trained to direct cars and buses in El Alto, a teeming, impoverished sister city of La Paz in Bolivia's Andes mountains. The women wear the bright petticoats and shawls of

Andean indigenous women, who are called "cholitas" in Bolivian slang. The only difference is that instead of wearing their traditional bowler hats they don khaki green police-style caps. Some also don fluorescent traffic vests.

Amid El Alto's dense traffic and the incessant honking of horns, 24-year-old Sofia Colque blows her police whistle with authority.

"Some drivers don't obey us and try to flirt with us, but they are making a mistake.

It is not easy but we make them respect us," Colque said. Poli Condori, the driver of a small bus, said hiring the women seemed to be a good step taken by Mayor Edgar Patana, but he had his doubts about whether the experiment would be successful.

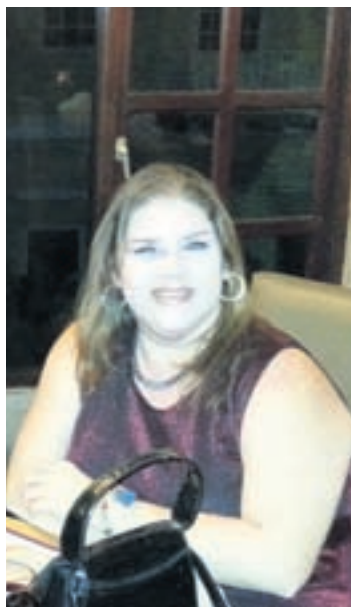
"The cholitas make the view happier, but I doubt they will be able to bring order to traffic. The people get on buses wherever they want; vehicles stop wherever they want. We have

bad habits. It is chaos," he said.

The indigenous traffic officers also educate pedestrians and help old people cross roads, said Jose Luis Varagas, head of El Alto's transportation department. In recent years, Bolivia's cholitas have been breaking social barriers, conducting television programs, working in offices, holding public posts and even participating in native fashion shows and beauty contests. □



Publishers of Aruba Today and Bon Dia Aruba: Caribbean Speed Printers Celebrates Holidays At El Gaucho!



ORANJESTAD- Employees of Aruba Today and Bon Dia Aruba celebrated their Christmas Dinner at El Gaucho Restaurant, where the cuisine and service were excellent, the libations were free-flowing, and the ambiance was sublime. As a token of appreciation for the hard worked done throughout 2013 each employee received a nice gift from the Board of Directors of Caribbean Speed Printers, who also had encouraging and spirited words to share with their team. This was highly appreciated by the employees, who had a festive and lively time at the annual Christmas party. Aruba Today, Bon Dia Aruba and Caribbean Speed Printers N.V. all wishes you all a Merry Christmas filled with joy and happiness. □



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PALM BEACH - Big wins and happy faces at the Stellaris Casino during the Feel Good Bingo event. After a few months the Progressive Bingo Jackpot fell with the amount of 42,917.65 florins. A very emotional Mrs.

Almira Franken could not believe her eyes after realizing she had the winning bingo card. She called BINGO within 50 calls and took home the big Progressive jackpot of 42,917.65 florins. The new Progressive Bingo

Jackpot starts at 25,106.65 florins. Every Thursday, Saturday and Sunday casino guests can participate for 15 florin, which including four cards for ten games, with \$2125 in guaranteed cash prizes, including the Progressive Jackpot, Golden & Silver Power Ball that also includes a progressive jackpot. The Stellaris Casino informs all bingo players that the first bingo for 2014 will be January 4th, 2013.

For upcoming specials and promotion, please visit the Stellaris Casino Facebook page or www.stellariscasino.com to stay updated. □



Free Zone Company Aruba's first waste to energy project

The groundbreaking for Aruba's first waste to energy project took place Wednesday December 18, 2013. This project is a joint venture between Ecological Technologies & Trading Free Zone, WEB Aruba and Free Zone Aruba and delivers one more step in the direction of Aruba's 2020 vision to become a fully fossil free economy.

During the Europe Meets the America's conference, held in May this year, a memorandum of understanding was signed to enable further development of this project.

The new fiscal reform package named 'Begunstigend Beleid' made an important contribution to the realization of the waste to energy project. Besides the influence of a fossil free economy, the Project will also have an impact on reducing the islands waste. The increasing garbage volumes will start to be curtailed to the benefit of the

quality of 'product Aruba'. Ecological Technologies & Trading Free Zone will supply WEB Aruba with biogas for the production of electricity which will be beneficial for local consumers of water and electricity.

In the first phase of the waste to energy project, 2MW will be produced, which is 2% of Aruba's electricity demand. In the future the project hopes to use 70% of household waste and produce 7MW. Free Zone Aruba NV is very excited about this achievement. This milestone demonstrates the key role Aruba's free zone can play in developing Aruba as Green Gateway for the region, says Greg Peterson, director of Aruba's Free Zone. Photographs: groundbreaking event and the directors of Utilities NV, Frank Hoevertsz, WEB NV, Oslin Boekhoudt, Free Zone Aruba, Greg Peterson and ET & T Free Zone, Freddy Kelkboom. □



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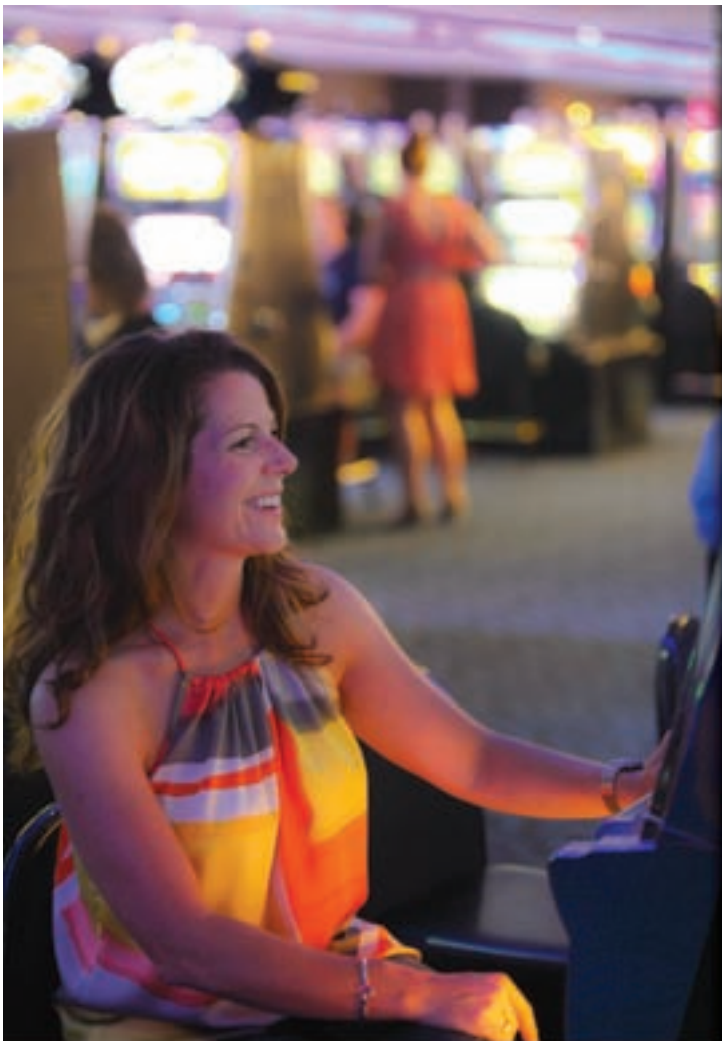


DRUIF BEACH - The diligent and hardworking crew of the Chamber of Commerce & Industry enjoyed an unforgettable evening under the stars at a beautiful Christmas dinner at the

Sand Piper's bar at Divi all-inclusive resort. The magnificent oceanfront served as backdrop to a gourmet dinner prepared by the resort's culinary brigade and enjoyed by the relaxed

and chilled staffers escorted by their spouses. All of the chamber's departments including the Registers, Business Information and Support, the Secretariat, ICT, Policy and the

Financial Administration, as well as the Executive Director came together to celebrate a successful business year, including a recent election of a third of the board. □



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NFL Playoff Picture: Panthers in, spots still open

Tom Brady and Peyton Manning clinched division titles, Cam Newton reached the postseason for the first time and a pair of all-or-nothing games loomed on the final weekend in a scrambled NFL playoff race.

The Chicago Bears missed a chance to seal a spot with a 54-11 loss at Philadelphia on Sunday night. Now, they'll host Green Bay next Sunday - the winner takes the NFC North, the loser is done.

Several hours later, in the last game of the regular season, the Dallas Cowboys will host the Philadelphia Eagles. The Sunday night showdown decides who wins the NFC East and who goes home.

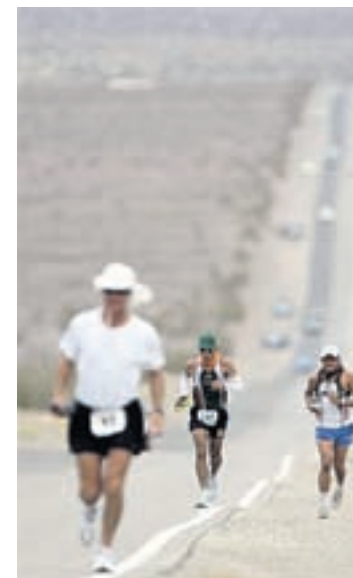
"Today we felt like we were playing for everything," Tony Romo said after his fourth-down TD pass with 1:08 left Sunday sent Dallas over Washington 24-23. "Next week will be the same thing."

Meanwhile, all the AFC division titles got settled. Denver, New England and Cincinnati won to join Indianapolis with crowns.

Continued on page 20



Carolina Panthers' Cam Newton (1) hurdles New Orleans Saints' David Hawthorne (57) in the second half of an NFL football game in Charlotte, N.C., Sunday, Dec. 22, 2013. The Panthers won 17-13. Associated Press



In this July 23, 2007 file photo, Jorge Pacheco, center, of Mexico, runs in Kiehl's Badwater Ultramarathon in Death Valley, Calif.

Associated Press

Death Valley puts brakes on running, cycling races

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Death Valley National Park is putting the brakes on ultramarathons and other extreme sports events that involve running and cycling until rangers can determine how safe it is to hold those competitions in a place that records the hottest temperatures on Earth.

A timetable for the safety review's completion hasn't been given. But until it is done, park officials say they will accept no new applications for cycling or running competitions in the park.

Park spokeswoman Cheryl Chipman said Monday that one previously scheduled event will go ahead as planned.

The suspension means the popular Badwater 135 ultramarathon that takes runners from the lowest point in the Western Hemisphere to the trailhead of the highest peak in the contiguous United States will have to make a detour. □

ECU wears down Ohio in Beef 'O' Brady's Bowl

By **FRED GOODALL**
(AP Sports Writer)

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) -- Vinatavious Cooper rushed for a career-best 198 yards, setting a Beef 'O' Brady's Bowl record and leading East Carolina to a 37-20 victory over Ohio on Monday. The Pirates (10-3) grabbed the lead for good on the first of Cooper's two touchdowns runs in the fourth quarter, a 31-yard burst with just under 10 minutes remaining.

East Carolina's Shane Carden threw for 273 yards

and one TD and also scored on a pass reception.

Cam Worthy caught an early 5-yard scoring pass from Carden, and then took a lateral from the junior quarterback and threw 14 yards back to Carden for a fourth-quarter TD that made it 31-20. Cooper put it well out of reach, finding an opening off left tackle and racing 22 yards for his second TD.

Continued on page 20



East Carolina wide receiver Cam Worthy (9) pulls in a 5-yard touchdown reception in front of Ohio cornerback Devin Bass (37) during the first quarter of the Beef 'O' Brady's Bowl NCAA college football game Monday, Dec. 23, 2013, in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Associated Press

Canucks overcome Luongo loss to beat Jets 2-1

The Associated Press
VANCOUVER, British Columbia (AP) — Vancouver overcame the loss of goaltender Roberto Luongo, scoring a late goal to beat Winnipeg 2-1 on Sunday and move up to a share of a playoff-yielding third place in the Pacific Division.

NHL Roundup
 Vancouver defenseman Chris Tanev scored what proved the winner at 10:23 of the third period, taking a pass in the high slot and ripping a shot past Jets goalie Ondrej Pavelec.

Luongo left the game in the first period, after having his leg clipped by big Winnipeg defenseman Dustin Byfuglien, and then being knocked flat during a goal-mouth collision.

Brad Richardson opened the scoring for Vancouver on a power play midway through the first period, and Evander Kane tied it for the Jets on a power play in the second.

In the day's other game, the New York Rangers had a 4-1 home win over Minnesota. New York's Carl Hagelin and Mats Zuccarello scored second-period goals to set up the Rangers' 4-1 win over Minnesota. Backup New York goalie Cam Talbot allowed Jason Pominville early goal but was steady the rest of the way in relief of struggling No. 1 goalie Henrik Lundqvist, who had allowed at least three goals in the past seven games, just after signing a long contract extension. □



New York Rangers goalie Cam Talbot watches as a puck flies past during the third period of an NHL hockey game against the Minnesota Wild, Sunday, Dec. 22, 2013, in New York. The Rangers defeated the Wild 4-1.

Associated Press

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NFL Playoff

Continued from page 18

Kansas City is assured of one AFC wild-card spot. Defending Super Bowl champion Baltimore, Miami and San Diego are tied at 8-7 for the other slot with even Pittsburgh at 7-8 still in it.

"You know, we're used to going out there and playing well when we need to when the playoffs are on the line," said Baltimore quarterback Joe Flacco, who threw two interceptions in a 41-7 loss to Brady and the Patriots.

Newton and his Carolina Panthers, along with Seattle, are the only NFC teams with guaranteed playoff berths.

San Francisco (10-4) can clinch a playoff spot Monday night with a win against visiting Atlanta.

Newton threw a 14-yard touchdown pass to Domenik Hixon with 23 seconds left to beat New Orleans 17-13, putting the Panthers in the playoffs for the first time since 2008.

Carolina (11-4) can wrap up the NFC South and a first-round bye in the playoffs with a win next Sunday at Atlanta.

"When we were 1-3 there



Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo, left, is hugged by guard Mackenzy Bernadeau as Washington Redskins nose tackle Barry Cofield, right, walks off the field after Romo threw the game tying touchdown pass late in the fourth quarter of an NFL football game in Landover, Md., Sunday, Dec. 22, 2013. The Cowboys defeated the Redskins 24-23.

Associated Press

Manning set an NFL record with 51 touchdown passes in a season. He threw four as the Broncos (12-3) handed Houston its 13th straight loss. Manning broke the mark of 50 set by Brady in 2007.

"I really feel like it's a team accomplishment, certainly an offensive accomplishment," Manning said. "There's a lot of people that played roles in this."

The Patriots (11-4) won their fifth straight AFC East title. Brady has guided New England to 11 division crowns, two more than any other starting quarterback in NFL history.

"They're all special. It's hard to come by, and this team's really fought hard all year," Brady said. "We've earned it. Eleven wins in the NFL's not easy, and to win a division title's not easy." □

was a lot of what-ifs, a lot of people that were jumping off the bandwagon," Newton said. "It was a lot of finger-pointing and saying, 'I told you so.' But as a team we stuck together and didn't veer off and had faith in each other." The 49ers, New Orleans and Arizona are competing for the last two NFC playoff slots.

Beef o brady

Continued from page 18

Tyler Tettleton and Derrius Vick threw scoring passes for Ohio (7-6), which overcame an early two-touchdown deficit to lead 20-17 before Cooper put East Carolina back in front before an announced crowd of 20,053 at Tropicana Field.

Breon Allen also scored on a 2-yard run for East Carolina, which won six of its final seven games to finish with the second-most victories in school history.

Carden set the school record for single-season yards passing with a 13-yard throw to Isaiah Jones on the drive ended with Allen's TD, making it 14-0. He completed 29 of 45 passes while boosting his season total to 4,139 yards, breaking Dominique Davis' record total for the Pirates. Cooper ran for 90 yards in the opening quarter alone,

becoming the third running back in East Carolina history to rush for 1,000 in consecutive seasons.

Justin Hardy, meanwhile, had eight receptions for 59 yards, setting a school record for yards receiving in a season.

He finished with nine catches, giving him 114 receptions for 1,284 yards. Ohio battled back after a slow start. Tettleton and Vick each threw a touchdown pass in a five-minute span to make it 14-all early in the second quarter.

Tettleton got the Bobcats going with a 26-yard completion to Daz' Patterson on a flea flicker, and then found Patterson for a 17-yard TD on the following play. Vick and Donte Foster combined for an 80-yard score on Ohio's next offensive play for the longest scoring pass in Beef 'O' Brady's Bowl history.

Foster finished with six catches for 160 yards, earning most valuable player

honors for Ohio. Tettleton was 21 of 40 for 228 yards, one touchdown and three interceptions.

East Carolina rebounded from a triple-overtime loss to Tulane in October to win five of its final six regular-season games.

Ohio stumbled in November losses to Buffalo, Bowling Green and Kent State before finishing with a 51-23 rout of Massachusetts that helped the Bobcats secure the trip to St. Petersburg.

Ohio accepted the bid to the Beef 'O' Brady's bowl after the American Athletic Conference was unable to fulfill its bowl commitments. Ball State lost to Central Florida in last year's game, making the trip when the Big East was unable to supply a team.

In denying Ohio a third straight bowl victory under coach Frank Solich, East Carolina stopped a four-game losing streak in bowl games. □

AP Source: Von Miller out for season with torn ACL

By **ARNIE STAPLETON**
AP Pro Football Writer

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (AP) -- A person with knowledge of the situation tells The Associated Press that Broncos linebacker Von Miller's season is over after tests revealed a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee.

The person spoke on the condition of anonymity because coach John Fox had not yet addressed the media at his regular Monday news conference. Miller was injured in the first quarter of Denver's 37-13 win at Houston on Sunday.

The injury ended a rough third season for the Broncos star, which began with a six-game drug suspension



Denver Broncos' Von Miller (58) is walked off the field after he was injured during the first quarter of an NFL football game against the Houston Texans, Sunday, Dec. 22, 2013, in Houston.

Associated Press

and finished with just five sacks in 10 games. He had 30 sacks in his first two NFL seasons. □

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NBA Capsules

Pacers firm up NBA East lead by beating Celtics

The Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) —

Paul George scored 24 points and Lance Stephenson recorded his third triple-double of the season, leading Indiana over Boston.

Stephenson had 12 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists as Indiana (22-5) won its second straight and maintained its grip on the Eastern Conference's best record. He's the only player in the league with more than one triple-double this season.

Avery Bradley scored 13 points for Boston. Courtney Lee and Jeff Green each had 11 in coach Brad Stevens' return to his hometown. Stevens grew up in Zionsville, an Indy suburb, and led nearby Butler to back-to-back national championship games as the Bulldogs' coach.

But there was no magic for the Celtics, who lost their third in a row.

RAPTORS 104, THUNDER 98

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) —

Kyle Lowry scored 22 points, making a pair of clinching free throws with 9.8 seconds left, and the Toronto Raptors handed the Oklahoma City Thunder their first home loss with a 104-98 victory on Sunday night.

The Raptors outscored Oklahoma City 6-0 in the final 1:25, all from the free throw line, and ended the Thunder's nine-game winning streak. Oklahoma City had been 13-0 at home, the NBA's longest unbeaten stretch to open a season since the Cleveland Cavaliers won



Indiana Pacers' Ian Mahinmi (28) dunks against Boston Celtics' Kelly Olynyk (41) during the first half of an NBA basketball game Sunday, Dec. 22, 2013, in Indianapolis.

their first 23 home games during the 2007-08 season. Amir Johnson had 17 points and 13 assists for Toronto, which won its fourth straight road game, its longest such streak since March-April 2002. Oklahoma City lost for the first time since Dec. 4 at Portland.

Russell Westbrook scored 27 points and Kevin Durant added 24 for Okla-

homa City, which missed its final four shots.

CLIPPERS 120, TIMBERWOLVES 116, OT

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Jared Dudley made a go-ahead 3-pointer with 38 seconds remaining in overtime and Chris Paul made five free throws in the final 19 seconds, leading Los Angeles over Minnesota. Blake Griffin had 32 points and 10 re-

bounds and was an uncharacteristic 10 for 11 from the free throw line before fouling out with 4:08 left in OT. The defending Pacific Division champions extended their winning streak to a season-best five games while beating the Timberwolves for the eighth straight time, their longest current streak against any opponent.

Jamal Crawford had 22 points for Los Angeles. Paul finished with 19 points and 13 assists.

Kevin Love had a season-high 45 points and tied a season best with 19 rebounds for the Timberwolves, back at Staples Center after their 104-91 loss to the Lakers on Friday night. Nikola Pekovic had a career-high 34 points and 14 boards. □

Associated Press

Court docs: Rangers' Martin victim in ransom plot

CURT ANDERSON

AP Legal Affairs Writer

MIAMI (AP) — Like many Cuban baseball stars, outfielder Leonys Martin dreamed of leaving the communist island for the bright lights and big money of Major League Baseball. Martin accomplished his goal in 2011 when he signed with the Texas Rangers, but not before what court documents and the U.S. Justice Department describe as a harrowing ordeal in which he was held for ransom in Mexico while his family members were kept under surveillance in South Florida.

Three people have been indicted in Miami on federal charges of hostage-taking and extortion conspiracy — counts that carry potential life prison sentences if they are convicted — and Martin himself is suing his alleged kidnappers for the return of more than \$1.3 million he has already paid them.

Andrew Zimbalist, a Smith College professor who specializes in sports economics, said the Martin case appears unique.

"I have never heard of a kidnapping case like this," Zimbalist said.

Many Cubans have defected over the years to play baseball in the U.S., including such current stars as Cincinnati Reds pitcher Aroldis Chapman, Los Angeles Dodgers outfielder Yasiel Puig and Oakland Athletics outfielder Yoenis



In this Sept. 30, 2013 file photo, Texas Rangers' Leonys Martin dives for a ball by Tampa Bay Rays' Ben Zobrist during the seventh inning of an American League wild-card tiebreaker baseball game, in Arlington, Texas.

Cespedes. In September, the Cuban government reversed decades of policy by announcing that its athletes will be allowed to sign contracts to compete in foreign leagues without defecting.

Compared to the vast majority of immigrants, Cubans get unique treatment by the U.S. government under the "wet foot, dry foot" policy that came about during the Cold War.

Cubans who reach U.S. soil are generally allowed to stay in this country, while those intercepted outside the U.S. are sent back home.

Martin, 25, a speedy center fielder for the Rangers, made his MLB debut in September 2011. Last season, in 147 games, he hit .260 with 49 runs batted in and 36 stolen bases. Martin and his attorney, Paul Minoff, declined comment for this story, as did the Rangers and MLB officials, citing the ongoing litigation.

A few years before joining Texas, Martin was a rising star in Cuba, traveling to baseball tournaments around the globe with the national team. After an August 2010 tournament in Japan, according to his lawsuit, he decided to leave

for the U.S.

He and family members and friends made contact with a man who offered them a trip from Cuba on a yacht to Cancun, Mexico. From there, they could eventually cross by land into the U.S.

But instead of journeying directly north, they were taken to a house lined inside with mattresses and watched by two armed men, one of them identified as Eliezer Lazo.

"You are worth a lot," Lazo told Martin, according to the lawsuit. "I am not going to let you go."

Lazo is one of the three

people charged criminally in the Miami federal indictment. He is serving more than five years in federal prison in Mississippi for money laundering and other crimes related to a South Florida health care fraud scam. Lazo has not yet entered a plea in the Martin case and court records do not show a lawyer for him. Eventually, Martin and other unidentified Cuban players were taken to a compound called "The Ranch" near Monterrey, Mexico, where they were supposed to train. Martin's family and friends were taken across the U.S. border at Laredo, Texas, and put on a bus to Miami where they would live for five months in a townhouse owned by Lazo, according to the lawsuit.

In Mexico, there was a nearby baseball field where the players would train and play games before U.S. scouts, and Martin was introduced to another man he was told would be his agent.

He was also told he had to sign a contract with an entity linked to Lazo called Estrellas del Beisbol (Baseball Stars) in which he promised to pay 30 percent of any future salary or bonuses — well above the 5 percent players typically pay.

"Martin had no choice but to sign it (as did the other players with him) considering that they were all being held hostage," Martin's lawsuit says. □

Associated Press

Soccer star Beckham will promote casinos in China

HANNAH DREIER

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Retired soccer star and sometime underwear model David Beckham has signed on to help promote Las Vegas Sands' properties in Singapore and the Chinese gambling enclave of Macau. Sands said in a statement that it hopes to cash in on Beckham's popularity in the region.

The Las Vegas-based company is the largest casino operator in Macau, the center of the modern day

gambling world.

The deal may help Sands win attention in mainland China, where casinos are illegal and casino advertising is also banned. Soccer is hugely popular in China. Beckham appears to have started his new gig already. In November, he posed for photographs with 100 local kids at the Venetian Macau and gave an hour-long interview. The children were selected with the help of several local community groups, including the Macau Special Olympics and

the Association of Rehabilitation of Drug Abusers of Macau. Details about what the partnership will look like over the long term are scarce. Sands said it will use the Beckham brand in dining and retail options at its casinos. Michael Leven, Sands' president and chief operating officer, said in a statement that the Beckham brand will help Sands "as we aggressively explore opportunities to further expand our presence in Asia."

Over the summer, Beck-



In this July 7, 2013, file photo, former soccer star David Beckham greets media and youth in Singapore at the Marina Bay Sands.

Associated Press

ham staged a similar event in Singapore, meeting about 60 kids at a Sands casino there.

Sands owns four booming casinos in Macau. The Venetian Macau is the largest casino in the world. □

Apple strikes deal to bring iPhone to China Mobile

JOE McDONALD
MARLEY SEAMAN
AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Apple's stock rose 3 percent in morning trading on Monday, a day after the company announced a long-anticipated agreement to bring the iPhone to China Mobile, the world's biggest phone company.

The deal has the potential to boost iPhone sales in a market where Apple Inc. faces intense competition. But even with China Mobile Ltd.'s vast state-owned network, marketing power and more than 750 million mobile accounts, the iPhone has enormous challenges to overcome in the world's most populous nation.

Apple's smartphone is already available in China through two smaller carriers, and although it is popular with well-heeled Chinese customers, the iPhone is losing market share to lower-priced smartphones from Samsung and local brands.

The iPhone 5S and 5C will go on sale in Apple and China Mobile stores beginning Friday, Jan. 17. China Mobile customers can register for phones starting Wednesday.

The companies didn't announce pricing or the terms of the agreement. The deal comes a month before China's Lunar New Year holiday in late January, a big gift-buying season. That "will provide an immediate boost to Apple's share in China," said analyst Nicole Peng of Canalys, a research firm.

Apple's stock rose \$15.90, or 3 percent, to \$564.92 in Monday's morning trading. Forecasts of possible increased iPhone sales under a deal with China Mobile vary widely, from 10 million to 40 million. A key issue is whether it leads to additional sales or only prompts existing iPhone owners to switch to China Mobile.

The iPhone will help China Mobile promote its new fourth-generation, or "4G",

network that received government approval this month. But analysts say Apple needed the agreement more than the Chinese carrier. That gave China Mobile leverage in negotiations over how to split costs, which for the high-priced iPhone usually includes subsidizing handset sales.

The iPhone faces tough competition from less expensive smartphones running Google's Android software. Collectively, Android phones far outsell Apple's iPhone. Apple CEO Tim Cook told the official Xinhua News Agency in January that he expects China to surpass the United States as its biggest market. □



A woman using a phone walks past Apple's logo near its retail outlet in Beijing Monday, Dec. 23, 2013. Apple and China Mobile announced a long-anticipated agreement Monday to bring the iPhone to the world's biggest phone company.

Associated Press

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Apple, techs lift the broader market

KEN SWEET
AP Markets Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Stocks rose in quiet trading Monday as investors start to close the books on 2013. Apple helped lift technology stocks after the company reached a deal to sell the iPhone to China's largest wireless carrier. The market has been moving broadly higher since last Wednesday, when

world's largest cell phone provider, to sell the iPhone in the world's most populous country. The iPhone is already sold through two smaller carriers there. Technology stocks in the S&P 500 rose 1.5 percent, more than twice as much as the broader index.

Trading was very light ahead of the Christmas holiday. Just 2.8 billion shares were traded on the

falling in the middle of the work week, will likely have light trading, he said.

In other economic news, consumer spending rose 0.5 percent in November, the most since June. Those are closely watched figures, especially leading up to the holiday season.

Retailer Jos. A. Bank rejected a \$1.5 billion buyout offer from Men's Wearhouse on Monday. The rivals have

US consumer spending rose 0.5% in November

MARTIN CRUTSINGER
AP Economics Writer
WASHINGTON (AP) —

Americans increased their spending in November by the most in five months, and their income edged up modestly.

Consumer spending rose 0.5 percent from October, when spending had risen 0.4 percent, the Commerce Department said Monday. It was the best showing since June. The gain was driven by a jump in spending on long-lasting durable goods such as autos.

Consumers' income rose 0.2 percent, an improvement from a 0.1 percent decline in October. Wages and salaries, the most important component of income, rose a solid 0.4 percent. That gain reflected strength in the private sector and a modest gain in government pay.

Consumer spending is closely followed because it accounts for about 70 percent of economic activity. The strong November showing suggests solid economic growth this quarter. Steady hiring and modest wage gains have boosted consumer confidence and given Americans more money to spend. At the same time, higher stock and home prices have driven up household wealth and made some people more comfortable about spending. The big rise in spending and smaller income gain meant that the personal saving rate slipped a bit to 4.2 percent of after-tax income in November. That was down from 4.5 percent in October.

An inflation gauge tied to consumer spending that is closely followed by the Federal Reserve showed that inflation is still running well below the Fed's target. Prices were unchanged in November and have risen just 0.9 percent over the past 12 months. The Fed's target for annual inflation is 2 percent. The economy, as measured by the gross domestic product, grew at an annual rate of 4.1 percent in the July-September

quarter, the government said Friday in its third and final estimate. The government's figure was up from its previous estimate of a 3.6 percent annual growth rate for the third quarter. Nearly all of the upward revision reflected faster spending for consumers, a possible sign of momentum entering the final three months of the year.

The 4.1 percent growth rate in the third quarter was the best performance in nearly two years. It was only the second time since the economic recovery began in mid-2009 that annual growth in any quarter has topped 4 percent.

Economists caution that growth will likely slow in the October-December period. That's because two-fifths of last quarter's gain came from an unusually large buildup in business stockpiles — something not likely to be repeated this quarter.

Analysts were encouraged by the acceleration in spending in the third quarter and say rising job growth could fuel more spending in the months ahead.

Retail sales have been solid in October and November, along with other signs that the economy is gaining momentum heading into 2014.

President Barack Obama took note last week of the encouraging reports, including four straight months of solid job gains. That spurt of hiring has helped lower the unemployment rate to 7 percent, a five-year low. The drag from higher taxes and across-the-board spending cuts has shaved an estimated 1.5 percentage points from economic growth this year, which analysts think will be around 1.8 percent.

But the effects will lessen next year, something economists note in their forecasts for around 2.5 percent growth or better in 2014.

A stronger outlook for the economy and job market led the Fed last week to begin winding down its bond-buying program. □



Chinese women use a non-Apple brand phone to take a photo of themselves outside the Apple retail shop in Beijing Monday, Dec. 23, 2013. Apple helped lift technology stocks Monday after the company reached a deal to sell the iPhone to China's largest wireless carrier.

(AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

the Federal Reserve said it will start pulling back on its stimulus program next month as the U.S. economy improves. Last week the government also raised its estimate for third-quarter economic growth to 4.1 percent, the fastest pace since 2011.

"Everything is going in the right direction," said Rob Stein, chief executive officer of Chicago-based Astor Investment Management.

The Dow Jones industrial average rose 73.47 points, or 0.5 percent, to 16,294.61. The Standard & Poor's 500 index was up 9.67 points, or 0.5 percent, to 1,827.99. The Nasdaq composite rose 44.16 points, or 1.1 percent, to 4,148.90.

Apple rose \$21.07, or 4 percent, to \$570.09 after the company reached a deal with China Mobile, the

New York Stock Exchange, well below the recent average of 3.4 billion.

Both the New York Stock Exchange and the Nasdaq Stock Market will be closed Wednesday for Christmas. Both exchanges will also close at 1 p.m. (1800 GMT) on Tuesday for Christmas Eve.

The market is heading for its best year in more than a decade. The S&P 500 index has increased 28 percent so far this year — 30 percent when dividends are included — putting it on track for its biggest annual gain since 1997.

"People want to hold on to these gains, so no one is going to take any undue risks this close to the end of the year," said Stephen Carl, head equity trader at Williams Capital. The next two weeks, with Christmas and New Year's Day both

made offers to buy each other in recent months, only to be rejected by the other party. Jos. A. Bank fell 74 cents, or 1.3 percent, to \$56.29 and Men's Wearhouse fell 38 cents, or 0.7 percent, to \$51.63.

Facebook rose \$2.65, or 5 percent, to \$57.77.

The social network was added to the S&P 500 effective Monday. Fund managers who replicate indexes like the S&P 500 are required to purchase stocks in a company when it's added.

Target fell 61 cents, or 1 percent, to \$61.88 after The Wall Street Journal reported that sales fell 3 percent to 4 percent in last weekend before Christmas. Target is dealing with a massive breach of security in credit and debit card data.

Bond prices fell slightly. □

The Average Investors' Stock Market Resolutions For 2014

KEN SWEET

AP Markets Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — 2013 was a great year for the average investor, but few market strategists believe that 2014 will be anywhere near as good. The simple strategy of buying U.S. stocks, selling bonds and staying out of international markets isn't going to work as well as it has, they say.

Some of Wall Street's biggest money managers have come up with a few resolutions to help investors' retirement portfolio have a good year:

— Curb your expectations

Few investors expected 2013 to be as big as it was. The S&P 500 index is up 28 percent for the year, its best year since 1997. Including dividends, it's up 30 percent.

On average, market strategists expect 2014 to be somewhat tame. Most are looking for the S&P 500 to rise to 1,850 to 1,900 points, a gain of just 2 to 4 percent.

— Keep your eye on valuation

Investors bid up stock prices to all-time highs this year, despite a mediocre economy and corporate profits that were less than spectacular.

At the beginning of the year, the price-to-earnings ratio on the S&P 500 was 13.5, meaning investors were paying roughly \$13.50 for every \$1 of earnings in the S&P 500. Now the S&P 500's P-E ratio is around 16.7. While a P/E ratio of 16.7 won't set off any alarm bells — the historical average is 14.5 — it is noticeably higher than it was a year ago.

Investors have high expectations for corporate profits next year, based on the prices they are paying.

"It's hard to believe that this market can go much higher from here without some corporate earnings growth," said Bob Doll, chief equity strategist at Nuveen Asset Management.

Profit margins are already at record highs, and corporations spent most of 2013 increasing their earnings by cutting costs or using financial engineering tools

like buying back their own stock.

Earnings at companies in the S&P 500 grew at an 11 percent rate in 2013. The consensus among market strategists is that profit growth will slow to around 8 percent in 2014.

However, if the U.S. economy continues to improve, and corporate profit margins expand, it could justify the prices investors have been paying for stocks.

— Don't get caught up in the euphoria

Be wary if your neighbor decides to jump head-first into

nomenon a "melt-up." As you can guess, a "melt-up" could lead to a "melt-down," as happened in the late 1990s with the dot-com bubble.

"I fear people, who sat out 2013, will jump in too fast next year and get burned," said Richard Madigan, chief investment officer for JPMorgan Private Bank.

Which leads us to:

— Don't panic, either

Stocks cannot go higher all the time. Bearish investors have been saying for months that stocks are due for a pullback in the near

— Cut your exposure to bonds

Fixed-income investors had a tough year in 2013. The Barclays Aggregate bond index, a broad composite of thousands of bonds, fell 2 percent. Investors in long-term bonds were hit even harder, losing 15 percent of their money since the beginning of the year, according to comparable bond indexes.

2014 is not looking good for bond investors, either.

The Federal Reserve has started to pull back on its bond-buying economic stimulus program. That

Madigan said that under normal circumstances he would advise investors to hold bonds that mature in an average of about five years. This measure is referred to as a bond's "duration."

For 2014, Madigan is advising investors to restructure their portfolio to have an average duration of two to two-and-a-half years.

"Long duration bonds are much more a riskier asset than a safe asset next year," Madigan said.

— Your stock market alternative in 2014 is ... stocks



Jason Hardzewicz, a floor official and trader for Barclays, works at his post on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, in New York. 2013 was a great year for the average investor, but few market strategists believe that 2014 will be anywhere near as good.

(AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)

the market next year.

A large number of investors have remained on the sidelines for this five-year bull market. Since the market bottomed in March 2009, investors pulled \$430 billion out of stock funds, according to data from Lipper, while putting nearly \$1 trillion into bond funds.

Professional market watchers are concerned that many individual investors, trying to play a game of catch-up, might rush into the market with a vengeance next year. The surge of money could cause stocks to jump if investors ignore warnings that the market is getting overvalued.

Wall Street calls this phe-

future.

The S&P 500 is up 66 percent since the stock market's last major downturn in October 2011. It has been resilient through several scares this year, including the conflict in Syria, the budget crisis and near-breach of the nation's borrowing limit in October.

In their 2014 outlook, Goldman Sachs analysts said that while the market has been strong, they see a 67 percent chance that stocks will decline 10 percent or more in 2014, which is known as a stock market "correction."

Goldman analysts still expect stocks to end the year modestly higher.

means one of the biggest buyers of bonds for the last year will slowly exit the market in 2014.

The Fed's exit could send bond prices falling.

"Bonds are hardly a place to be in 2014," Nuveen's Doll said.

That doesn't mean investors should avoid bonds altogether, strategists say.

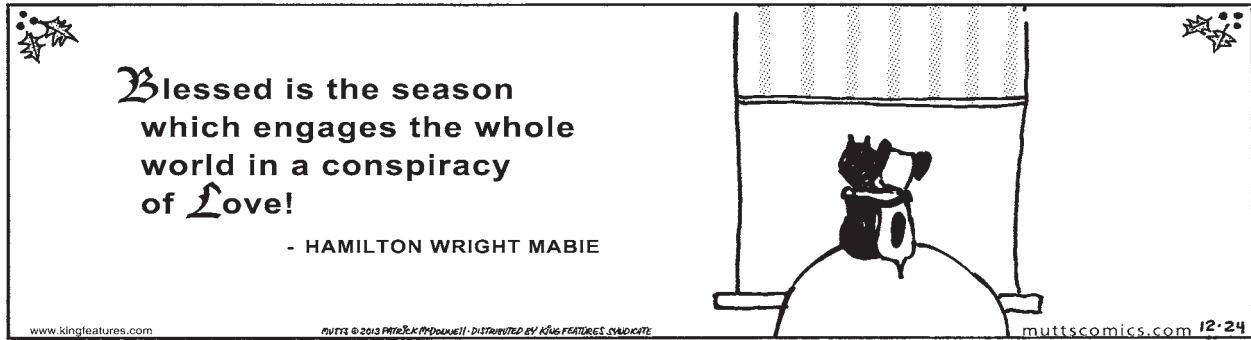
Instead, investors should reorganize their portfolio to focus more on bonds that mature in relatively short periods of time. The prices of those bonds tend to fluctuate less than those of bonds that take longer to mature, and are less likely to lose value when interest rates rise, as many expect will happen in 2014.

Other than stocks, the average investor typically has access to three other types of investments: cash, bonds and commodities such as gold. None are expected to perform better than the stock market next year.

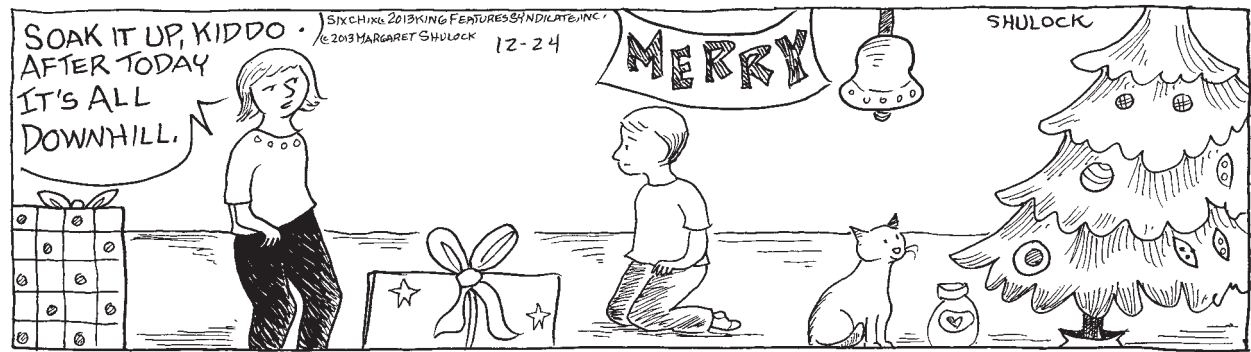
If bonds had a tough 2013, gold investors got punched in the stomach. Gold is down 28 percent this year, and is on its way to its first annual loss since 2000.

Gold is expected to have another tough year in 2014, with inflation under control and the Fed expected to gradually exit the bond market. Analysts at Barclays Capital expect gold to end 2014 at \$1,270 an ounce, about 6 percent higher than where it is today. □

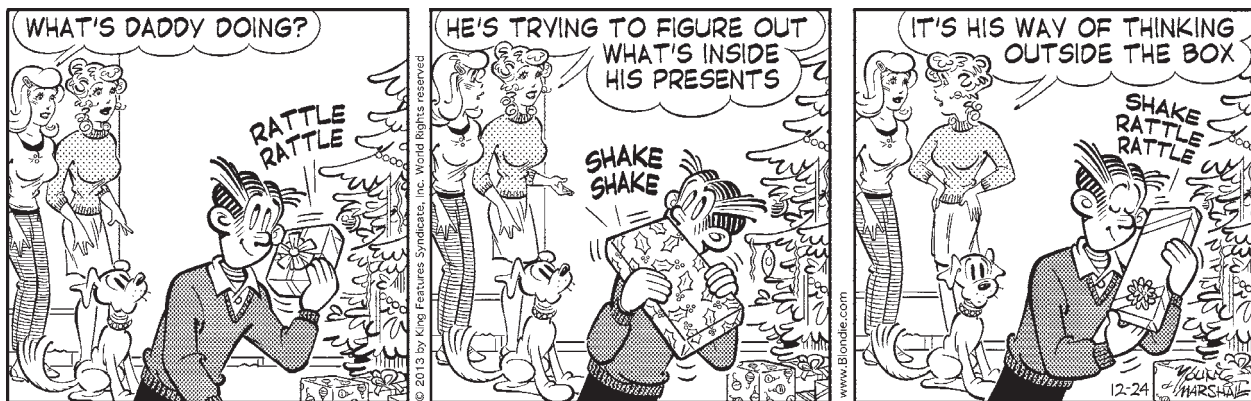
Mutts



6 Chix



Blondie



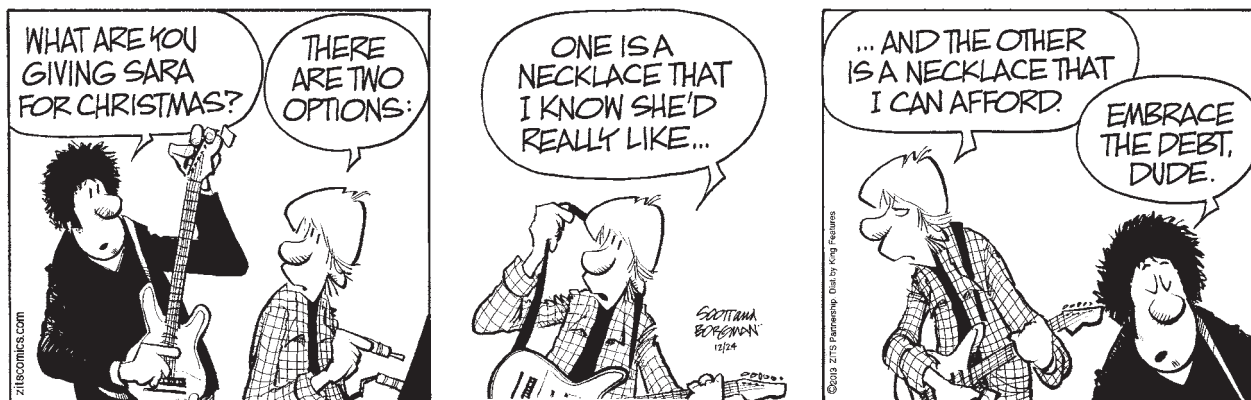
Mother Goose & Grimm



Baby Blues



Zits



Conceptis Sudoku

		8		9				
	7		1		6			
		2				8	5	
1			6		4	2		8
	2			5			6	
4		9	8		7			1
	3	6				9		
			3		2		8	
				7		3		

Difficulty Level ★★

12/24

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Sunday.

Yesterday's puzzle answer

6	7	4	2	3	8	5	1	9
5	9	8	4	7	1	2	3	6
3	1	2	5	9	6	7	4	8
4	5	1	3	6	2	8	9	7
8	6	9	7	1	4	3	2	5
2	3	7	8	5	9	4	6	1
1	8	3	6	2	7	9	5	4
7	2	6	9	4	5	1	8	3
9	4	5	1	8	3	6	7	2

ACROSS

- 1 Stinging insect
4 Mea __; guilty one's phrase
9 Airhead
13 Gobbles up
15 Approximately
16 Deserve
17 Part of the foot
18 Perch
19 Oxford or pump
20 Small Tibetan pooch
22 Baby dogs
23 Deep crack
24 Fraternity letter
26 Vast plain of Asia or Europe
29 Late comedian
34 "Grimms' Fairy"

- 35 Made clothing
36 Have debts
37 Related
38 -weeny
39 Chew persistently
40 Wager
41 Department store chain
42 British fellow
43 Athletic shoes
45 Less well-off
46 -made; synthetic
47 Serve drinks
48 Messy person
51 Lending a hand to
56 Swimming spot
57 Deviousness
58 Vittles
60 Shaping tool
61 Mistake
62 Days of __; yesteryear
63 Requirement
64 Sits for a spell
65 Barbie's beau

DOWN

- 1 Actress Arthur
2 Actor James __ Jones
3 Engrave
4 Wide-mouthed wine decanter

1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8		9	10	11	12
13			14		15					16			
17					18					19			
	20			21						22			
			23					24	25				
26	27	28				29	30			31	32	33	
34					35					36			
37					38					39			
40				41						42			
43			44					45					
								46					
48	49	50				51	52	53			54	55	
56						57				58		59	
60						61				62			
63						64				65			

Created by Jacqueline E. Mathews

12/24/13

Monday's Puzzle Solved

T	H	E	F	T	E	B	B	S	F	A	N	G
E	A	G	L	E	X	R	A	Y	O	D	O	R
A	L	G	E	R	C	A	N	S	R	O	B	E
R	E	S	E	R	V	E	D	T	R	E	B	L
F	I	A	S	C	O	G	A	M	M	A		
I	N	N	E	L	D	E	R	P	R	O	U	D
S	T	E	M	A	R	E	A	S	N	O	S	Y
T	O	W	E	R	A	S	S	E	S	Z	E	E
M	E	A	S	L	E	S	F	L	E	E		
A	L	L	I	E	D	P	A	S	S	W	O	R
C	O	L	E	S	N	U	B	T	E	H	E	E
A	P	E	S	E	A	R	L	A	S	I	A	N
W	E	N	T	A	B	L	E	S	T	O	R	

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12/24/13

- 42 Boxing match
44 Walked leisurely
45 Baffling questions
47 Aviator
48 Reach across
49 Mother __; rich ore deposit
50 Leak out
52 Positive
53 Titles for knighted men
54 Breakfast __; recess in a kitchen
55 VP Al __
59 Lion's lair

Ghosts of holiday parties past and present

Ken Herman

© 2013 Cox Newspapers

AUSTIN, Texas -- I had a very nice time at Gov. Rick Perry's recent "Christmas Coffee" for journalists. The Governor's Mansion is decked out in holiday finery, and a warm, under-control fire glowed in the fireplace of a house gutted by an out-of-control one a few years back.

Politicians' holiday gatherings for the press have a long history. At the Texas Governor's Mansion, they've been scaled back from what they once were, and there's nothing wrong with that. Years ago, though not always, they used to be full-blown receptions, complete with buffet meal and adult beverages. This year, as last year, Perry cordially hosted us and provided coffee and appropriate pastries, etc., for an event that began at 10 a.m. and ended promptly at 11 a.m. when a tour group was queued up to see the mansion.

I've been to a few of these over the years. They're not without some controversy, and we'll address that below. Gov. Ann Richards was a great hostess at her holiday receptions. Journalists' kids were welcomed. Richards was great with kids, scrunching down to talk with them. She made the kids feel welcomed, even ones not on their best behavior.

Richards' holiday receptions always included what some on her staff called "the annual indignity." Richards led, and insisted on full participation, in a rousing, choreographed rendition of "The Twelve Days of Christmas." Richards apparently designed the choreography, which

featured appropriate movements for each verse -- be it lords a-leaping, drummers drumming, pipers piping. Richards would demonstrate and there was no choice but to participate.

Six geese a-laying was the one that tested the limits of what you were willing to do in plain view of other humans. Richards would squat down low, make the face a human might make if laying an egg and somehow make it clear you had to do likewise every time those geese came around again in the song.

The quality and duration of Gov. Bill Clements' holiday receptions tracked his political fortunes. When he was on top, the party and the drinks flowed. A fellow longtime local journalist recently recalled this greeting from Clements when things were going well: "Scotch, right?"

And I recall Clements' 1982 holiday reception, which came shortly after Mark White ousted him. Clements' body language and menu made it clear this would be little more than a drop-by. (Warning: Columnist exaggeration, but not much, ahead.) The cuisine was limited to Ritz crackers and Cheez Whiz.

Gov. George W. Bush hosted nice holiday receptions, as he did in the White House, where presidents endure dozens of receptions, often several per evening. There's one for almost all groups that interact with the president, be it congressional members, the diplomatic corps or journalists. For that last category, there's one for print journalists and one for broadcasters.

At all the receptions,

there's a line for getting photos taken with the president and first lady, usually in front of a holiday-decorated fireplace. Like everything at the White House, things run on a tight schedule. You get your couple of minutes with the president at the designated photo spot, you get time to wander the wonderfully decorated rooms and enjoy the buffet. And, at a precisely designated time, some formally uniformed military officers very politely but very definitely tell you it's time to leave.

What goes on at these receptions is small talk, sometimes about family, sometimes about news. At Perry's 2012 holiday event he mentioned to several of us that Florida had issued more concealed handgun licenses than Texas. I wrote a column, with some attempted humor, about that. I felt awful when the column ran the day of the Newtown school shootings, a day when nothing about guns was funny.

I probably could argue it either way, but I don't think there is anything ethically wrong with journalists mingling with politicians at the latter's holiday receptions. Seems like the name of the game for us is getting access to these folks. So why turn it down when invited, especially if there will be cookies? (For the record, I consumed nothing, other than fellowship, at Perry's recent press reception. □)

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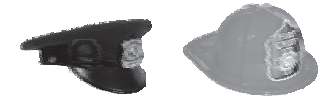
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In this Nov. 18, 2013 photo, rubbish is piled on the edge of cultivated land near Caivano, in the surroundings of Naples, southern Italy. **Associated Press**

FRANCES D'EMILIO
Associated Press

CAIVANO, Italy (AP) — On
Ciro Fusco's farm in the
shadow of Mount Vesuvius,
police swooped down one
recent day and planted a
sign prohibiting anyone
from harvesting the broc-
coli or even setting foot on
the land.

It was too late: some of his
crops had already been
sold at nearby markets.
Now the farmer is waiting
for the results of lab tests to
see if his vegetables were
tainted by toxic waste.

The farmlands around Na-
ples, authorities say, are
contaminated from the
Mafia's multibillion-dollar
racket in disposing of toxic
waste, mainly from indus-
tries in Italy's north that ask
no questions about where
their garbage goes for a
fraction of the cost of le-
gal disposal. Dozens of
area fields have been se-
questered, after authorities
found that decades of tox-
ic waste dumping by the
Camorra crime syndicate
had poisoned the wells,
tainting the water that ir-
rigates crops with lead,
arsenic and the industrial
solvent tetrachloride.

In a strong signal that the
state is cracking down on
the lucrative business, a top
Camorra boss, Francesco
Bidognetti, was convicted
last month of poisoning the
water table in the town of
Giugliano with toxic waste
and received a 20-year

sentence. It was the stiffest
punishment yet for waste
dumping. Officials esti-
mate that the waste seep-
age at a hill-like dump in
Giugliano will keep poison-
ing the water there for half
a century.

The findings have sparked
protests by tens of thou-
sands of people who
marched through Naples'
streets last month demand-
ing to know whether they
have been eating tainted
vegetables for years.

One of them was Anna
Magri, whose son died of
leukemia a few months shy
of his third birthday. Magri
said she doesn't buy fruit
and vegetables from local
open-air markets anymore
because she fears toxic
waste dumping might be
linked to his cancer. Stud-
ies are being conducted
to try to determine if there
is a link between the area's
cancer rates and the toxic
waste dumping.

"I buy at the supermarkets
now. I have two other chil-
dren" to worry about, said
Magri, who lives in Afrago-
la, a town in the heart of
the dumping area. While
the vegetables irrigated
by water from contami-
nated wells go to local
markets, supermarkets are
considered safe because
they have strict quality
standards backed up by
spot checks.

Gen. Sergio Costa, Na-
ples' environmental police
chief, said the Camorristi

Mafia toxic waste dumping poisons Italy's farms



In this Nov. 19, 2013 photo, a sign advises that a cultivated field near Caivano, in the surroundings of Naples, southern Italy, is sequestered by police. **Associated Press**

have "poisoned their own
territory, they poisoned
their own blood."

Tests are still ongoing,
but Costa described the
amounts in area wells as
reaching "dangerous" lev-
els. In an interview with The
Associated Press, Costa
rattled off a list of substanc-
es in higher-than-permissi-
ble levels contaminating
13 farmland irrigation wells:
Arsenic, cadmium, tin, ber-
yllium and other metals;
tetrachloride and toluene,
among other chemicals
used as industrial solvents.

On one farm in Caivano,
Costa said, four times the
permissible level of lead
was found in the irrigation
well's water. Lead con-
tamination was found in
cabbages irrigated by that
water but not in tomatoes,
said Costa, illustrating the
complexity of testing crops
for toxicity. The wells are
not used for drinking water.
The waste comes mainly
from factories, process-
ing plants and hospitals,
trucked down from Italy's
industrial north to the mob-
sters' power base near Na-
ples and Caserta. Some of
it was buried under a soc-
cer field in Casal di Prin-
cipe, a mob stronghold.
Waste was also buried un-
der a water-skiing pool in
the town of Castel Voltur-
no near the sea, accord-
ing to Naples-based anti-
Mafia Prosecutor Giovanni
Conzo. The toxic waste

problem is longstanding.
The national environmen-
tal group Legambiente
says Camorra mobsters
since 1991 have system-
atically dumped, burned
or buried nearly 10 million
tons of waste, almost all
of it coming from facto-
ries that either don't seek
to know where the waste
ends up or are complicit
in the crimes. According
to evidence used in trials,
the waste contained PCBs,
asbestos, industrial sludge
and metal drums filled with
the dangerous solvents
used to make paint.

"How could this all hap-
pen?" Michele Buonomo,
Legambiente's Naples-ar-
ea president, asked in an
interview.

Franco Roberti, Italy's top
organized crime fight-
er, said it wasn't just the
Camorra profiting off the
waste racket. In Italy's in-
dustrial north, factories
and processing plants
saved at least half of the
cost of legitimate waste
disposal or detoxification,
and companies falsified
documentation identifying
the wastes' content, he
said.

In the Camorra's power
base, he added, town of-
ficials, dump operators or
farmers with vacant land
closed their eyes to the
topic to get their own pay-
offs. Roberti said a Camor-
ra turncoat had told him in
interrogations that "mon-

nezza" — Neapolitan for
garbage — was, in effect,
worth its weight in gold.

Investigators' first big break
came in 2007. Turncoat
Gaetano Vassallo from the
Casalesi clan gave pros-
ecutors a "very complete
picture" about the racket,
Roberti said. He told them
where waste had been
dumped and buried. And
he indicated which com-
panies, mainly in Italy's
north, were turning to the
Camorra to cart away
their waste.

Vassallo's tips were borne
out when investigators, us-
ing backhoes and shovels,
dug into the sprawling Gi-
ugliano dump. Exhaustive
analyses of soil samples by
a geologist in a two-year
study, whose results were
made public this fall, found
many of the cancer-caus-
ing or otherwise harmful
substances exactly where
the turncoat said Bidog-
netti had them dumped
over several years.

Geologist Giovanni Bal-
estri's study, commissioned
by anti-Mafia prosecutors,
of soil and aquifers con-
taminated by the dump
found a laundry lists of
substances similar to those
discovered around the
Caivano farms: Chromium,
lead, nickel, sulfates, tolu-
ene and other substances
— all in concentrations
higher than, and often far
exceeding, permissible
levels. □

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Lawrence beats Cyrus, Netflix for top entertainer

SANDY COHEN

AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The battle for AP entertainer of the year came down to the Girl on Fire and the Queen of Twerk.

Jennifer Lawrence edged out Miley Cyrus by one vote in The Associated Press' annual survey of its newspaper and broadcast members and subscribers for Entertainer of the Year. There were 70 ballots submitted by U.S. editors and news directors. Voters were asked to consider who had the most influence on entertainment and culture in 2013.

Lawrence won 15 votes. Cyrus had 14. Netflix was a close third, earning 13 votes for altering the TV landscape with its on-demand format and hit original series.

But Lawrence — who started the year with an Academy Award for best actress, fueled a box-office franchise as "The Hunger Games" heroine Katniss Everdeen, and wrapped 2013 with a critically acclaimed performance in "American Hustle" that just earned Golden Globe and Screen Actors Guild Award nominations — charmed fans everywhere with her candid sincerity.

She was also a fashion darling — a muse for Dior — who made headlines with her pixie haircut. ("That was the weirdest thing that ever happened to me," she recently told Jon Stewart.)

Lawrence declined comment for this story.

The 23-year-old actress "is not only talented and beautiful, but comes off as incredibly intelligent, genu-

ine, funny and well-spoken in her public appearances and interviews," writes Kristi Runyan of The Derrick and The News-Herald Newspapers in Oil City, Pa. "It's refreshing to see a young woman not squandering her talent and success by succumbing to the temptations many do in Hollywood and who actively speaks about the ridiculous behavior of some of her peers."

Speaking of ridiculous behavior, Cyrus raised eyebrows throughout 2013 with her embrace of twerking, nudity and public pot smoking. The 21-year-old "Wrecking Ball" singer also made news with her pixie chop, but her breakup with fiance Liam Hemsworth and highly sexualized (and scrutinized) performances made her water-cooler chatter all year.

"She made the biggest splash, without comment on whether I thought it was a good thing," said Jim Turpin of KMPH-TV in Fresno, Calif.

Women have dominated the Entertainer of the Year contest. Past titleholders include Adele, Lady Gaga, Tina Fey, Betty White and Taylor Swift.

Stephen Colbert is the lone male winner in seven years of voting.

Netflix commanded votes for changing viewing habits (binge-watch "Breaking Bad," anyone?) and challenging the traditional TV-release concept with its original series. The outlet eschewed typical TV pilots and released a season's worth of episodes at once of its acclaimed series "House of Cards" and



This Nov. 20, 2013 file photo shows actress Jennifer Lawrence sporting a pixie haircut at a special screening of "The Hunger Games: Catching Fire" in New York.

Associated Press

"Orange Is the New Black." "In a divided entertainment landscape that includes the fans of pop princesses like Miley as well as high-minded devotees of cutting-edge filmmaking,

Netflix is the one common denominator," said Sean Stangland of Paddock Publications in suburban Chicago.

The beloved, Emmy-winning series "Breaking Bad"

was in fourth place with 10 votes. Justin Timberlake, whose year included a pair of albums and top-selling tours, seven Grammy nominations and two film roles, claimed fifth place. □

'Fast & Furious 7' delayed until April 2015

NEW YORK (AP) — Universal Pictures has delayed the release of "Fast & Furious 7" for almost a year following the death of star Paul Walker. The studio announced Monday that the "Fast & Furious" sequel will be released in April 2015, instead of July. Shooting on the film was about halfway finished when the 40-year-old Walker died in a car crash outside of Los Angeles.

Walker will still appear in the film, though Universal has not said exactly how it will handle his unfinished performance. □



In this film publicity still released by Universal Pictures, Paul Walker, left, and Vin Diesel, are shown in a scene from "Fast & Furious."

Associated Press

Pixies to perform in Israel

JERUSALEM (AP) — An Israeli promoter for the Pixies says the American alternative rock band will perform in Israel next summer — four years after the band canceled a concert following a deadly Israeli raid on a pro-Palestinian Turkish aid flotilla to Gaza.

The Nidar Oz publicity group said Monday the Pixies canceled its 2010 concert because of the "tense security situation." It didn't elaborate why the band has decided to perform in Israel now.

A number of high-profile musicians have refused

to perform in Israel due to its policies toward the Palestinians, including British rockers Elvis Costello and Roger Waters.

The Pixies' website list an appearance with American rockers Soundgarden in Tel Aviv on June 17 and 18. □

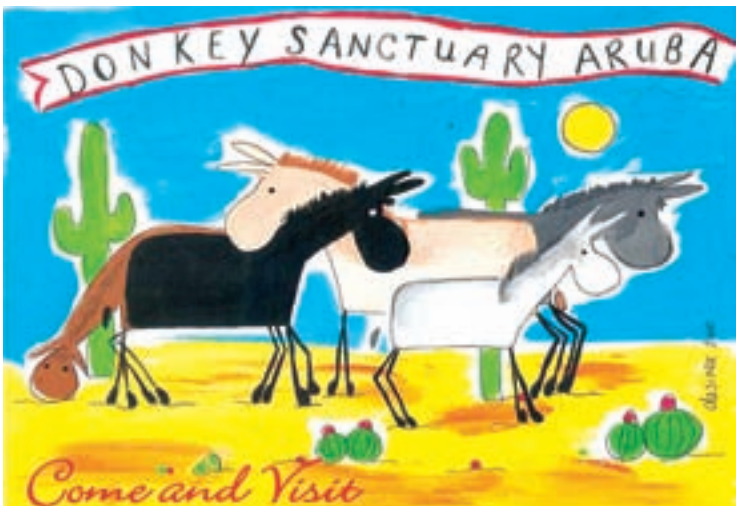


Exhibit A: Reality TV footage becomes a legal tool

ANTHONY MCCARTNEY

AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — They invite camera crews into their homes in the hopes of high ratings, endorsement deals and a taste of fame. Yet for some reality television stars, their notoriety brings some unexpected grief from tax collectors or pricey court cases. That's the predicament Oscar-nominated actor Ryan O'Neal found himself in, spending several weeks in a Los Angeles courtroom as he defended himself against allegations that he didn't own one of his most cherished possessions: an Andy Warhol portrait of longtime lover Farrah Fawcett.

Some of the evidence used against him was footage shot by a reality TV crew for her series "Chasing Farrah," and other projects where O'Neal and Fawcett allowed cameras into their private lives.

The portrait is his, a jury said Thursday. But even he had to question aloud one day toward the end of the trial how much it was all costing him. (His attorney says a lot).

With families such as the Kardashians and those on the "Real Housewives" shows opening up their homes in cities across the country, lawyers to the stars

see reality television crews as a weapon that can be used against their clients.

O'Neal's troubles began when a disgruntled producer of Fawcett's show convinced her alma mater, the University of Texas at Austin, that the Warhol portrait didn't belong to the actor. But TV footage — even just a few fleeting frames — can also be used by tax collectors, bankruptcy trustees and others to wreak havoc, said Bradford Cohen, an attorney who specializes in celebrity tax and estate issues at Venable LLP.

"It's a really dumb idea," Cohen said of allowing film crews into one's home. He said he regularly advises celebrity clients not to do reality television, citing instances where tax officials have opened cases based on what they've seen on TV.

"It just provokes inquiry," Cohen said. "If it doesn't add up, it just arouses their suspicion."

When federal officials indicted Teresa and Joe Giudice, stars of Bravo's reality series "The Real Housewives of New Jersey," they noted the couple's salary from the network and accused them of hiding assets in a bankruptcy filing after the show's first season aired. Most of the charges relat-



In this July 30, 2013 file photo, "The Real Housewives of New Jersey" stars Giuseppe "Joe" Giudice, 43, left, and his wife, Teresa Giudice, 41, of Montville Township, N.J., walk out of Martin Luther King, Jr. Courthouse after an appearance in Newark, N.J. Federal prosecutors cited the Giudice's "Real Housewives" income in court filings and accuse the couple of hiding assets in a bankruptcy case filed after the show's first season. Both have pleaded not guilty to a host of financial fraud charges dating back to 2001.

Associated Press

ed to loan applications the couple submitted before the show.

Cohen and other lawyers see the footage of what the University of Texas lawyers saw in "Chasing Farrah" — as evidence.

"Reality shows are especially dangerous because you don't know what context is going to be put around them," said Laura Zwicker, a partner at Greenberg Glusker who specializes in setting up high-value trusts and estates.

"From my perspective as an estate planner, the risk is not that somebody is going to see items but is going to make comments about their value that the IRS is going to come back and stick you with."

But veteran reality television producer Jason Carbone said the benefits outweigh any potential risks.

"It makes no sense to me," said Carbone, who's CEO and founder of production company Good Clean Fun. His company's credits

include "Run's House" featuring rapper Reverend Run and "Tia & Tamera," with actresses Tia and Tamera Mowry.

Carbone said whether to show off what's in someone's home is just one of many considerations that go into planning a reality series.

He said he's worked in homes where some areas are off limits, or he suggests valuables get moved so they aren't damaged.

As for attorneys who tell their clients not to do reality TV, Carbone said, "I would say get rid of your attorneys."

Reality TV is a genre where both up-and-coming stars and A-listers have seen success, Carbone said. In the right hands, "They should conceivably make your life better by the time your show is over."

While audiences love the shows, courts have to deal with the footage on a case-by-case basis. In O'Neal's trial, a judge initially blocked university lawyers from playing the sound on a video clip in which Fawcett said she was considering selling one of two Warhol portraits of her. After other evidence about Fawcett's comments to friends was introduced, the jury did hear the actress' remarks. □



In this Friday, Dec. 20, 2013 frame grab from video provided by KRON-TV, famed rock guitarist Carlos Santana, left, greets his former bandmate Marcus Malone on the streets of Oakland, Calif.

Associated Press

OAKLAND, California (AP)

— A news reporter for a San Francisco television station has reunited rock guitarist Carlos Santana with a former bandmate he hadn't seen in decades and who

now lives on the streets of Oakland.

Reporter Stanley Roberts ran into percussionist Marcus "The Magnificent" Malone while working on a story about illegal dumping

Santana reunites with ex-bandmate, now homeless

last week, KRON-TV in San Francisco reported.

Although he initially was skeptical of the homeless man's claim that the Santana Blues Band got its start in his mother's garage in the late 1960s, Roberts checked out the story and confirmed it.

And on Friday, he took Santana for a surprise visit to the camper where Malone has been staying.

"You don't know how afraid I am to let you see me," Malone said softly after he and the Rock and Roll Hall of Famer embraced.

"We cherish you," Santana replied.

"It's an honor to be in your presence."

Santana has credited Malone with being an important influence on his Afro-Latin sound, according to former Rolling Stone magazine writer Ben Fong-Torres' book "Not Fade Away: A Backstage Ticket to 20 Years of Rock & Roll." Malone played congas on Santana's eponymous first album, but left the band in 1969 shortly before its seminal performance at Woodstock when he was impris-

oned for manslaughter, according to Fong-Torres.

The two men told Roberts they had not seen each other since then.

During their meeting on Friday, Santana promised to bring Malone a set of congas and to help him get on his feet.

Since Roberts' story aired, another original member of the Santana Blues Band, percussionist Rod Harper, and producer Bobby Scott also have expressed interest in reuniting with Malone. □

Good Poor, Bad Poor



TIMOTHY EGAN
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On Sundays, this time of year, my parents would pack a gaggle of us kids into the station wagon for a tour of two Christmas worlds. First, we'd go to the wealthy neighborhoods on a hill - grand Tudor houses glowing with the seasonal incandescence of good fortune. Faces pressed against the car windows, we wondered why their Santa was a better toy-maker than ours.

Then, down to the valley, where sketchy-looking people lived in vans by the river, in plywood shacks with rusted appliances on the front lawn, their laundry frozen stiff on wire lines. The rich, my mother explained, were lucky. The poor were unfortunate.

Dissenting voices rose from the back seat. But didn't the poor deserve their fate? Didn't they make bad decisions? Weren't some of them just moochers? And lazy? Well, yes, in many cases, my mother said, lighting one of her L&M cigarettes, which she bought by the carton at the Indian reservation. But neither rich nor poor had the moral high ground.

As the year ends, this argument is playing out in two of the most meanspirited actions left on the table by the least-productive Congress in modern history. The House, refuge of the shrunken-heart caucus, has passed a measure to eliminate food aid for 4 million Americans, starting next year. Many who would remain on the old food stamp program may have to pass a drug test to get their groceries. At the same time, Congress has let unemployment benefits expire for 1.3 million people, beginning just a few days after Christmas.

These actions have nothing to do with bringing federal spending into line, and everything to do with a view that poor people are morally inferior.

"The explosion of food stamps in this country is not just a fiscal issue for me," said Rep. Steve Southerland, R-Fla., chief crusader for cutting assistance to the poor. "This is a defining moral issue of our time."

It would be a "disservice" to further extend unemployment assistance to those who've been out of work for some time, said Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky. It encourages them to sit at home and do nothing.

"People who are perfectly ca-

pable of working are buying things like beer," said Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., on those getting food assistance in his state.

No doubt, poor people drink beer, watch too much television and have bad morals. But so do rich people. If you drug-tested members of Congress as a condition of their getting federal paychecks, you would have most likely caught Rep. Trey Radel, R-Fla., who recently pleaded guilty to possession of cocaine. Would it be Grinch-like of me to point out that this same congressman voted for the bill that would force many hungry people to pee into a cup and pass a drug test before getting food? Should I also mention that the median net worth for new members of the current Congress is exactly \$1 million more than that of the typical American household - and that that may influence their view?

For the record, the base line benefit for those getting help under the old food stamp program works out to \$1.40 a meal. And the average check for those on emergency unemployment is \$300 a week. If you cut them off cold, the argument goes, these desperate folks would soon find a job and put real food on the table. They are poor because they are weak.

I met a wheat farmer not long ago in Montana whose family operation was getting nearly \$300,000 a year in federal subsidies. With his crop in, this wealthy farmer was looking forward to spending a month in Hawaii. No one suggested that he pass a drug test to continue receiving his sizable handout, or that he be cut off cold and encouraged to grow something that taxpayers wouldn't have to subsidize. One person deserves the handout, the other does not. But these distinctions are colored by your circumstances - where you stand depends on where you sit.

When a million Irish died during the Great Famine of the 1840s, many in the English aristocracy said the peasants deserved to starve because their families were too big and indolent.

This week, Mayor Mike Bloomberg tried not to sound like a plutocrat out of Dickens when asked about the homeless girl, Dasani, at the center of Andrea Elliott's extraordinary series in The New York Times - a Dickensian tale for the modern age.

"The kid was dealt a bad hand," Bloomberg said. "I don't know why. That's just the way God works. Sometimes some of us are lucky, and some of us are not."

And in that, he echoed my mother at Christmas. Luck is the residue of design, as the saying has it. But the most careful lives can be derailed - by cancer, a huge medical bill, a freak slap of weather, a massive failure of the potato crop. Virtue cannot prevent a "bad hand" from being dealt. And making the poor out to be lazy, or dependent, or stupid, does not make them less poor. It only makes the person saying such a thing feel superior. □



Ideas From A Manger



ROSS DOUTHAT
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Pause for a moment, in the last leg of your holiday shopping, to glance at one of the manger scenes you pass along the way. Cast your eyes across the shepherds and animals, the infant and the kings. Then try to see the scene this way: not just as a pious set-piece, but as a complete world picture - intimate, miniature and comprehensive. Because that's what the Christmas story really is - an entire worldview in a compact narrative, a depiction of how human beings relate to the universe and to one another. It's about the vertical link between God and man - the angels, the star, the creator stooping to enter his creation. But it's also about the horizontal relationships of society, because it locates transcendence in the ordinary, the commonplace, the low.

It's easy in our own democratic era to forget how revolutionary the latter idea was. But the biblical narrative, the great critic Erich Auerbach wrote, depicted "something which neither the poets nor the historians of antiquity ever set out to portray: the birth of a spiritual movement in the depths of the common people, from within the everyday occurrences of contemporary life." And because that egalitarian idea is so powerful today, one useful - and seasonally appropriate - way to look at our divided culture's competing worldviews is to see what each one takes

from the crèche in Bethlehem.

Many Americans still take everything: They accept the New Testament as factual, believe God came in the flesh, and endorse the creeds that explain how and why that happened. And then alongside traditional Christians, there are observant Jews and Muslims who believe the same God revealed himself directly in some other historical and binding form. But this biblical world picture is increasingly losing market share to what you might call the spiritual world picture, which keeps the theological outlines suggested by the manger scene - the divine is active in human affairs, every person is precious in God's sight - but doesn't sweat the details. This is the world picture that red-staters get from Joel Osteen, blue-staters from Oprah, and everybody gets from our "God bless America" civic religion. It's Christian-ish but syncretistic; adaptable, easygoing and egalitarian. It doesn't care whether the angel really appeared to Mary: The important thing is that a spiritual version of that visitation could happen to anyone - including you. Then, finally, there's the secular world picture, relatively rare among the general public but dominant within the intelligentsia. This worldview keeps the horizontal message of the Christmas story but eliminates the vertical entirely. The stars and angels disappear: There is no God, no miracles, no incarnation. But the egalitarian message - the common person as the center of creation's drama - remains intact, and with it the doctrines of liberty, fraternity and human rights. As these world pictures jostle and compete, their strengths and weaknesses emerge. The biblical picture has the weight of tradition going for it, the glory of centuries of Western art, the richness of millenniums' worth of theological speculation. But its specificity creates specific problems: how to remain loyal to biblical ethics in a commercial, sexually liber-

ated society.

The spiritual picture lacks the biblical picture's resources and rigor, but it makes up for them in flexibility. A doctrine challenged by science can be abandoned; a commandment that clashes with modern attitudes ignored; the problem of evil washed away in a New Age bath.

The secular picture, meanwhile, seems to have the rigor of the scientific method behind it. But it actually suffers from a deeper intellectual incoherence than either of its rivals, because its cosmology does not harmonize at all with its moral picture.

In essence, it proposes a purely physical and purposeless universe, inhabited by evolutionary accidents whose sense of self is probably illusory. And yet it then continues to insist on moral and political absolutes with all the vigor of a 17th-century New England preacher. And the rope bridges flung across this chasm - the scientific-sounding logic of utilitarianism, the Darwinian justifications for altruism - tend to waft, gently, into a logical abyss.

So there are two interesting religious questions that will probably face Americans for many Christmases to come. The first is whether biblical religion can regain some of the ground it has lost, or whether the spiritual worldview will continue to carry all before it. The second is whether the intelligentsia's fusion of scientific materialism and liberal egalitarianism - the crèche without the star, the shepherds' importance without the angels' blessing - will eventually crack up and give way to something new.

The cracks are visible, in philosophy and science alike. But the alternative is not. One can imagine possibilities: a deist revival or a pantheist turn, a new respect for biblical religion, a rebirth of the 20th century's utopianism and will-to-power cruelty.

But for now, though a few intellectuals scan the heavens, they have yet to find their star. □

O' Christmas Tree, Thy Leaves Can Be So Lucrative

PAUL SULLIVAN

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Chris Botek, a tree grower in Leighton, Pa., is used to people being shocked by how much his Christmas trees cost.

"People come from the city and they're used to paying \$150 to \$200 a tree," he said. They look at you and say, 'Are you kidding me?'" Botek gets \$6.25 a foot - that's \$50 for a fresher version of that 8-foot tree sitting on an urban sidewalk.

His local customers, the ones who live near the 250 acres he has filled with firs and spruces, are shocked for a different reason. "Some people say they could go down the road and get any tree in the field for \$25," he said. And the pricing gets even more complicated than that: When Botek sells his trees to retailers from the District of Columbia to Connecticut, he charges them \$23 a tree.

Unlike turkeys at Thanksgiving - which supermarkets often sell at a loss to bring in customers - Christmas trees are priced to make money. The same can be said of the larger timber industry of which Christmas trees are a small but lucrative part.

But the path to success in the broader world of timber and the narrower world of Christmas trees couldn't be more divergent than the roads in Robert Frost's yellow woods.

In the 1960s, John Oughton's family went the timber route. He said his wife's father wanted out of the cattle business, and Oughton suggested that the family use its farm in Mississippi to grow trees for pulp and building materials.

They planted yellow pine, poplar, white and red oak, and a few cypress trees. These trees grow high into the sky and are sold like commodities when they're cut down.

But yellow pines can take 16 to 18 years to mature and hardwoods, like oak, up to 30 years. A cypress tree could take 80 to 95 years to reach maturity, he said.

"Every year you're harvesting something," said Oughton, who added that the land was also used for deer and wild turkey hunting.

Around the time Oughton's family entered the timber business, John Wyckoff's father - he had also grown tired of cattle - persuaded his father to let him plant Christmas trees on the family's farm in New Jersey. Five decades later, the Wyckoff family sells 5,000 to 6,000 fir and spruce trees in the month from Thanksgiving to Christmas.

What Wyckoff does is more labor-intensive than just letting the trees grow. Each tree, he said, has to be shaped annually so it will look like a conical Christmas tree. He has 65,000 trees on



John Wyckoff, who supplied Christmas trees to the White House after one of his Douglas firs won a national competition, inspects a tree on his farm in Belvidere, N.J.

(Laura Pedrick/The New York Times)

170 acres, and it takes seven to 10 years before a tree reaches the standard height of 7 to 8 feet for a Christmas tree.

Cline Church, president of the National Christmas Tree Association and a Christmas tree farmer in North Carolina, said that the average price a consumer paid last year for a Christmas tree was about \$40. A typical tree farmer spent \$8 to \$10 on each 7-foot tree while it was growing on his farm, and the average price for that tree sold to retailers was \$20 to \$25. Shipping costs added a further \$2 to \$5 to a tree. Call it \$30 in overall costs to

harvest a Christmas tree.

In that situation, the tree grower made about a 9.6 percent compounded annual return, and the retailer selling the tree for the average price made 33 percent in a month, not counting the retailer's other expenses. Botek said he had a customer in Washington who gets well over \$100 for his trees - a price familiar to many tree buyers in New York City. Church said the supply and the demand for real Christmas trees had been in equilibrium for years, at 30 million to 35 million trees a season, so the guy on the corner, like Botek's retailer, was the one profiting mightily, although he did have to stand in the cold for about a month. While there is definitely a profit for the retailer, the industry is made up of mostly family farms, Church said, which means that there is not a lot of need for outside investors.

Timber, however, is open to a certain kind of investor. Since the shape of a tree doesn't factor into the price of timber, the carrying costs are relatively low, about \$5 an acre, which covers insurance, taxes and a forester to clean the property and watch for disease.

The barrier to entry, however, is high. Brian C. Duke, director of agricultural services at Northern Trust, said a 10,000-acre forest could range in

cost from \$10 million around the Great Lakes to \$40 million in the Pacific Northwest. Returns on timberland have historically been around 9 to 10 percent a year, which explains why most of the industry remains dominated by institutional investors and larger timber companies.

Of course, investing in timber is not just about watching the trees grow and shooting a deer or two. Thorne Perkin, managing director of Papamarkou Wellner Asset Management, said there were environmental risks, such as fires, hurricanes and insect infestation as well as economic risks in tying up money for so long in exchange for a modest, if consistent, single-digit return. "This is not like owning a share of Exxon that you can just sell," he said. There are alternatives, like buying stocks in forest companies or shares in an exchange-traded fund. Some families pool their money. And while timber is a passive investment, Oughton said it was not as easy as he had thought it would be. "When I retired in 2005, I took it up as a full-time project," he said, from his home in South Florida. "Surprisingly, it's become more of a full-time job."

As for the rest of us, the surest way to get a better return on our investment is to pack up the family and drive to a Christmas tree farm. □



Trees on the farm of John Wyckoff, in Belvidere, N.J., Dec. 19, 2013. Christmas trees are priced to be a small but profitable part of the larger timber industry.

(Laura Pedrick/The New York Times)